

Summarised inspection findings

Melville-Knox Christian School - Aberdeen

Independent School

Post-registration inspection

16 January 2024

Key contextual information

Melville-Knox Christian School - Aberdeen, is an independent faith-based school located in the Grace Reformed Church building in the Mastrick area of Aberdeen City.

The school's vision is outlined in a constitution. This is founded on a statement of faith and principles of doctrine, grounded fully in the Reformed Confessions, especially the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. The constitution defines the ethos of the school's life in terms of the pursuit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Children are taught to oppose inequality, and to be supportive of those who are in need. All staff recruited to work in the school are required to adhere to the principles of the constitution without exception. At present the school is located in the Grace Reformed Church, though a new location would be sought if projected numbers increase to the extent that the present facilities are insufficient.

The school has a designated classroom area, a small office and a kitchen area accessed by the school. The school is registered for a maximum of 15 pupils. The current roll is 14 children in a composite class including children from primary one to primary five. Some children have full time and some have part time attendance patterns.

The leadership and governance structure comprises the Board of Directors, the School Management Committee and the newly-formed Parents and Friends Association. The staff structure includes a lead teacher and classroom assistant who is also the school administrator.

The school opened in January 2023, before closing in April 2023 due to a lack of pupils and then re-opening again in August 2023.

1.4 Leadership and management of staff

good

This indicator highlights the importance of sound governance and fair and proper recruitment and selection of staff. It focuses on accountability, responsibility and shared values as important features of building and sustaining a highly-professional staff team. Effective empowerment of staff and partners with due regard to wellbeing and positive relationships is a key feature of a successful professional team. The themes are:

- Governance framework
- Building and sustaining a professional staff team
- Staff wellbeing and pastoral support

- There is a three-tier governance structure at Melville-Knox Christian School - Aberdeen, comprising the Board of Directors (BoD), the School Management Committee (SMC) and the newly-formed Parents and Friends Association (PFA). This leadership structure is supported by a clear governance framework. In addition to the schools governance structure, Melville-Knox schools have a contractual arrangement with the Board of Reformed Christian Education Scotland, which provides over-arching support as the school seeks to achieve its purpose and goals.
- The BoD is not involved in the day-to-day running of the school but effectively maintains an oversight of strategic planning and financial aspects of the school's work. Two members of the BoD have teaching experience, which helps to inform discussions well about the learning provision in Melville-Knox Christian School - Aberdeen. The lead teacher reports directly to the BoD on recent developments in the school. The BoD has seven members and has recently widened its membership to include directors with expertise in, for example, finance. This process of broadening the skillset of the Board of Directors should support the evaluation of future school improvement priorities. The BoD could be further developed through the creation of sub-committees to oversee aspects of the school's work.
- The SMC membership includes the lead teacher, parents/carers and others who wish to support the school as friends. It meets once or twice each term to discuss the lead teacher's latest progress report, a financial report from the school treasurer, a report from the PFA and any other competent business. These reports give an accurate account of how resources are used to support children's learning experiences and inform next steps for school improvement.
- The PFA comprises the lead teacher, parents and other friends of the school, with membership approved by the BoD. The PFA will support the work of the school through discussions, for example, about marketing and future expansion. At the time of the inspection visit the PFA had not yet formally convened to appoint a chair and to agree key roles, responsibilities and points for immediate action. The addition of the PFA should develop further wider parental involvement in the school.
- At present Melville-Knox Christian School – Aberdeen, does not have a formal school improvement plan. The BoD set out the intention to create an improvement plan this academic year and this should now be taken forward as a priority. It is recommended that the PFA plays a key consultative role in agreeing the priorities within the improvement plan and the agreed timescales for action. There is also scope to include the views of the children regarding what might be improved in the school in the future. There is a need to ensure that the entire school community feels a sense of ownership in shaping the direction of the school's future development.

- The lead teacher reports to the SMC and BoD on the curriculum being offered in the school and on learners' progress. The lead teacher has been empowered to develop the school's curriculum in line with the constitution, aligning it to some extent with the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). She has created a clear weekly timetable of activities to ensure coverage of all aspects of the curriculum. In addition, appropriate materials and texts have been purchased that align with the school's constitution. The curriculum has been approved by both the BoD and SMC. Lines of communication between the lead teacher, the BoD, the SMC and the PFA are clearly defined and embed accountability in the formal meeting structure.
- The lead teacher is registered with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS). The lead teacher is also supported by a line manager who serves on the SMC and BoD. It is important, going forward, that this support includes a formal process of professional review and development (PRD). This will assist the lead teacher in identifying and participating in learning opportunities which will help with ongoing development of professional skills and knowledge. It will be essential that this formal PRD process ensures the lead teacher can maintain her GTCS registration. As planned, the lead teacher should seek opportunities to link with teachers in other establishments, including Melville-Knox Christian School – Glasgow. This could include dialogue to develop further classroom practice and the curriculum. The lead teacher's line manager provides her with pastoral and wellbeing support through regular meetings. The lead teacher line manages the classroom assistant and oversees her professional development. As the lead teacher and classroom assistant undertake further developments and improvements in the school it will be important to ensure that their workload and wellbeing are carefully monitored.
- Melville-Knox Christian School - Aberdeen, is supported by an educational adviser, who is a retired headteacher. He has been in this role since planning for Melville-Knox Christian School - Aberdeen began, approximately four years ago. The educational adviser keeps the BoD and SMC up to date with educational developments in the school and is a key person in the school's recruitment of staff. He has also supported the lead teacher and other staff with, for example, curriculum design and child protection training.
- The BoD and SMC should continue with plans to identify GTCS-registered supply staff who could keep the school open in the event of the lead teacher being absent or attending professional learning opportunities.

1.5 Management of resources to promote equity

Management of resources and environment for learning

- The existing classroom in the Grace Reformed Church building is small, which places some restrictions on classroom organisation. If the school roll increases, alternative accommodation would need to be considered.
- The lead teacher has access to digital tools to support learning and makes good use of these, for example during assemblies. Children's use of digital resources is very carefully monitored by staff to ensure that the children's experience is in line with the school's constitution. Staff and the SMC should plan and increase the range of digital resources available to children to enhance their learning, while ensuring that children are kept safe from online risks.
- During session 2022/23, there was a period during which there were no children attending the school. The lead teacher used this time to plan and resource the curriculum. She was well supported by the SMC and BoD in this process. The BoD works well with the lead teacher to ensure children can engage with quality resources. As a result, the classroom is well provided with resources which are used to support and challenge the children in their learning. At all times, the lead teacher has been careful to make use only of resources which are fully aligned with the underlying guiding principles of the organisation.
- During break and lunch times, the children have access to an outdoor area which includes a grassy area and a tarmac area. At present this area is under-resourced, with insufficient materials for the children to engage with. It is recommended that the PFA and SMC work with the lead teacher to source materials, such as loose parts to stimulate children's imagination, critical thinking, creativity and exploration.
- The work of the lead teacher is supported well by a classroom assistant, who also provides weekly German language learning alongside her school administrative duties. She also supports the lead teacher very well in being aware of and meeting the children's wellbeing needs.
- Moving forward, plans for further resourcing of learning experiences should be reviewed regularly taking account of the school's self-evaluation processes, linked to school improvement priorities.

This indicator highlights the importance of placing the needs of learners at the centre of curriculum design and development. The structure and delivery of the curriculum should take good account of local and national circumstances. The curriculum is the totality of learning experiences across the four contexts as delivered by the school and its partners. An effective curriculum results in strong outcomes for all learners. The themes are:

- Rationale and design
- Development of the curriculum
- Learning pathways
- Skills for learning, life and work

- The school's constitution and mission statement explicitly outline the vision, rationale and strategic overview of the school and its community. The constitution states that the school should 'assist parents in carrying out their Biblical privilege and responsibility to educate and train their children, by the grace of God, and in accordance with His inerrant and infallible Word'. It will be important for children to understand more fully what the school provides for them in a developmentally appropriate version of the constitution. This will help the children to enact and better understand the guiding principles in their day-to-day interactions.
- All aspects of Melville-Knox Christian School's constitution outlines that educational, governance and community life are conducted in compliance with God's Word. The curriculum was developed in consultation with parents, the BoD and the SMC. Policy documents explain clearly the guiding philosophy behind each curriculum area. The documents are shared with parents during an initial application interview with SMC members. Throughout the school day, the curriculum includes health, safety and character development. The SMC and lead teacher should continue to develop a curriculum that is relevant to the local community and the wider Scottish context.
- Staff use learning pathways for literacy and English, numeracy and mathematics effectively. This ensures children build on prior learning and minimise gaps in their learning in these curriculum areas. Literacy and English have been successfully aligned to Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) experiences and outcomes and a commercial mathematics programme aligns with the English national curriculum. These adaptations enable progression in children's learning to be effectively tracked. The lead teacher has established learning pathways for most curricular areas, and these are in the early stages of being used to track children's progress. Staff and the SMC need to develop further a progressive learning pathway for all aspects of health and wellbeing. Children's quality of learning should be reviewed regularly to ensure it is challenging and offers breadth, depth and application. This includes monitoring the outcomes for children who attend part time.
- Most children enjoy opportunities to discuss any achievements outside school with an adult in school who knows them well. Children can talk confidently about the way that achievements link to their Christian values. Staff should link these achievements to skills for learning, life and work. For example, children should be supported to understand how teamwork skills, problem solving, leadership, enterprise and creativity are linked to the world of work. Staff plan to introduce an overview of the achievements being shared by children and the skills they are developing. This will help staff identify where there are gaps in children's learning and experiences as well as those children who are at risk of missing out.

- All children receive two hours of physical education (PE) each week. Staff and volunteers provide a range of opportunities for children to learn and develop a variety of skills and knowledge about fitness and the importance of being healthy.

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 are proud of their school. They experience a trusting and caring ethos at Melville-Knox Christian School - Aberdeen, which supports children to develop new friendships and feel confident in the recently established learning environment. There are positive relationships and interactions between staff and children and between children and their peers. Most children enjoy learning and feel comfortable approaching staff with questions. Staff know children well as individuals and are aware of their needs.
- Most children are motivated and engaged in their learning. They engage more effectively when learning is linked to real and meaningful contexts. The further development of children's listening skills will support a greater understanding of expectations and how they can be successful. This development should reduce the occasional negative impact on engagement for other children.
- Staff deliver lessons which are well-structured in literacy and English, numeracy and mathematics. In a few lessons across other curricular areas, the challenge of learning could be increased and more clearly differentiated. Staff use questioning effectively to engage the whole class and groups, and to check children's understanding. This supports children to think for themselves and contribute to discussions with confidence.
- Staff use oral and written feedback well to support and praise children in their learning. Children would benefit from discussions about their next steps in learning. This will support them to know themselves better as independent learners. Staff should more consistently share the purpose of lessons and support children to understand how to be successful in their learning. Across the school, children are at the early stages of creating individual goals linked to their character development work.
- Staff use digital technology well to enhance teaching. For example, television programmes, documentaries or films are used to support project work. Children would benefit from developing a broader range of digital skills as they progress through the school. This will enable them to extend and enhance their learning across a wider range of curricular areas.
- Staff plan practical investigations, cookery, singing, art, drama, themes and project time to support the application of knowledge and skills. They use the outdoor space for a variety of curricular areas including science and physical education. Staff plan effectively over a variety of timescales across almost all curricular areas, responding to and building upon children's interests. Staff encourage children to reflect on their learning at the end of lessons. It will be important to continue to develop children's self-reflection skills to develop further their involvement in planning their learning. Staff have developed planning which is informed by a range of effective summative and formative assessments. They record assessment information

regularly linked to the 'four stages of progress' and use this to support planned discussions on children's progress and attainment. Staff track children's progress across literacy and English, numeracy and mathematics. As planned, the embedding of tracking approaches for other curricular areas should provide a more detailed picture of children's overall progress.

- Parents are content with information they receive from school and feel this supports their children's learning at home. They are aware of the progress their children are making through termly progress reports and twice-yearly parents' evenings.

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, young people. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and a representative from the Board of Directors.

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

- Staff help children to understand various aspects of their wellbeing. Almost all children know the importance of physical activity and fitness and are knowledgeable about healthy eating. The lead teacher and classroom assistant embody the school's caring and supportive ethos in their work. Children are confident and have positive relationships with adults and each other. The school curriculum has a strong emphasis on character education. This programme helps children develop successfully their knowledge of personal qualities to become responsible citizens with a firm sense of moral purpose.
- Children would benefit from more discussions about their wellbeing. Children need to be aware of occasions when they are facing wellbeing challenges and what support they can call on to help them to overcome these challenges. The views of the children should inform any new plans to develop the wellbeing curriculum in the school.
- School staff help children to understand the concept of being safe. Children spoke proudly about their knowledge of the importance of keeping themselves safe and helping others to be safe. They are treated with respect in the school and are respectful towards others almost all of the time. School staff should continue to emphasise the qualities and characteristics expected of Melville-Knox children to reinforce this learning. The SMC and staff should work with children to create leadership roles for children of all ages. This should support the development of skills for learning, life and work and give them a greater say in decisions which affect them.
- Members of the SMC and BoD support school staff with their wellbeing. Staff know that there are clear routes for communication should any wellbeing challenges arise, and that support will be available if needed.
- Staff have a good understanding of statutory duties, for example regarding child protection and safeguarding. Helpers in the school have all joined the Scottish Government's protection of vulnerable groups (PVG) scheme. School staff have developed strong relationships with families which supports effective planning to meet children's needs.
- The school has a detailed behaviour policy, which was last revised in 2019. School staff should now work with children to consider how to revise this document to align with the very strong positive relationships that are evident in the school. This will help to reinforce the school's strong commitment to inclusion, supporting diversity and developing further children's acceptance of differences in people in the wider world.
- School staff have a clear understanding of bullying behaviour and work very well with children to ensure that there are few incidences of behaviour that could be classed as bullying. Commendably, staff have developed supportive approaches to record any bullying incidents

and how they have been dealt with. School staff should now create a bespoke Melville-Knox Christian School, Aberdeen anti-bullying guidance. This should then be used to support explicit conversations with children and families about bullying and how it will be dealt with should an incident arise.

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.