

Summarised inspection findings

Carronhill School

Aberdeenshire Council

29 November 2022

Key contextual information

Carronhill School is a non-denominational school in the town of Stonehaven. The school provides specialist provision for Children and Young people in the Laurencekirk, Stonehaven, and Portlethen Community School Networks, who have additional support needs.

The senior leadership team comprises a headteacher and a depute headteacher. The headteacher and depute headteacher have both taken up post in the last three years.

During the period of school closures, the school operated as a Hub. Bubble and strict routines were required to support the complex health and wellbeing of children, young people, and staff. A small number of children and young people attended the hub while almost all participated in remote learning from home as a result of their complex health and care. Staff absences during and after the period of the pandemic has been significant. This has now settled and staffing is more stable.

At the time of the inspection, the school roll was 42 children and young people across primary and secondary stages. All pupils have complex additional support needs. 34% of pupils receive Pupil Equity Funding.

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

- Senior leaders are providing effective leadership across the school. They have supported the school community successfully through the challenges of the pandemic. The headteacher and depute headteacher are highly visible and work alongside staff to promote the vision, values, and aims of the school. The vision, values, and aims are strongly embedded into the life of the school, and are relevant to the needs of children and young people. Led by the headteacher, staff should continue to regularly revisit the vision, values, and aims to ensure learners' needs and aspirations continue to influence the work of the school.
- Senior leaders and staff have a good understanding of the social, economic, and cultural background of children, young people, and their families. As a result, staff have created a caring and pupil-led approach to supporting individuals with a focus on health and wellbeing. Staff maintained close contact with families during the pandemic, providing bespoke support as necessary. All children and young people transitioned successfully back to face-to-face learning following the periods of school closure. In the past year, all children and young people have maintained high levels of school attendance and continue to re-engage successfully with their learning at school.
- Children, parents, and a range of partners have regular opportunities to offer their views on the school's strengths and areas for development. Senior leaders gather views predominantly

through surveys, questionnaires, school events, and feedback at review meetings. Parents feel their views are valued and the school has an active Parent Council. The headteacher consults regularly with parents and partners on whole-school improvement initiatives, for example how best to use their Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) allocation. Senior leaders are at an early stage in involving children, parents, and partners in purposeful school self-evaluation. Senior leaders need to continue to engage all children, parents, partners, and the wider community more fully in the work of the school. Senior leaders should demonstrate how the contributions from stakeholders lead to improvement.

- Teachers and pupil support assistants feel valued and enjoy leading and contributing to aspects of school improvement. Senior leaders take full cognisance of staffs views and support them to be innovative cross the work of the school. Senior leaders support staff well to engage in a range of valuable career-long professional learning including promoting positive relationships and de-escalation strategies. Teachers are leading on initiatives to improve the sensory curriculum and develop children's communication skills. Senior leaders should continue to support staff to determine if school improvement priorities are leading to better outcomes for children and young people.
- Senior leaders have well established approaches in place to monitor and evaluate the work of the school. This includes analysis of learning and teaching approaches, curriculum, and tracking and monitoring of learners' progress. Staff absence during the pandemic had a detrimental impact on senior leader's ability to undertake quality assurance activities. Senior leaders should continue to implement robust approaches to monitor the work of the school with a greater focus on the impact of improvement priorities.
- The headteacher has started to build valuable links with neighbouring special and mainstream schools. Planned opportunities for collegiate working with colleagues in other schools have been impacted negatively by the pandemic. Senior leaders should re-establish these links and continue to look outwardly to build further networks with special schools.
- Senior leaders have a good awareness of the individual needs of children and families who require additional support. They take good account of national priorities, including closing the poverty-related attainment gap when planning for improvement. They understand well the increased challenges around poverty caused by the pandemic and cost of living crisis. Senior leaders use this knowledge effectively to help inform the use of PEF to improve outcomes for identified learners. Targeted interventions, alongside effective partnerships, have supported identified learners to engage purposefully with their learning and transition successfully into further training and education. Senior leaders monitor the impact of PEF effectively with a clear focus on children's and young people's outcomes.

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 schools ethos and culture reflects a clear commitment to children's rights and promotes positive relationships among all children, young people, and staff. Dialogue between staff and learners consistently supports a safe, nurturing, and respectful atmosphere in and around classrooms.
- Most staff effectively use voice, gesture, and mirroring to provide sensory and developmental communication approaches to engage children and young people in learning. However, a minority of children and young people do not engage in learning for prolonged periods. Staff should continue to look at ways of reducing the time children and young people are not engaging in meaningful learning.
- The majority of children and young people consistently show patience and kindness towards each other. When other learners become distressed, children and young people often show tolerance, resilience, and remain focused on their own activities. The majority of planned learning is delivered using one to one ratios. Children and young people should now be provided with further opportunities to work collaboratively with each other and express themselves in a constructive manner.
- Staff support children and young people in their learning by encouraging them to do well. A minority of learners work well independently on creative tasks with minimal staff support. Children and young people do not have enough opportunities to reflect on their learning. At times, staff give children and young people answers too quickly without checking for understanding or providing sufficient time to process information and make a response.
- A majority of staff use a range of assessment approaches well to check children and young people's progress. In a few classes children and young people are supported to self-assess their work this should now be developed consistently across the school to support learners to understand better what they are learning and how they can be successful. The development and use of foundation milestones and milestones in particular to support literacy and numeracy is helping teacher to make more accurate judgements in relation to national expectations.
- Staff have had limited opportunity to participate in moderation activities partly due to the pandemic. As a result, moderation is not informing teachers' professional judgements of children and young people's progress in the broad general education. Teachers would benefit greatly from engaging in more moderation activities to improve their confidence in making professional judgements. Teachers will then be more able to determine how well children are learning and progressing across the curriculum.

- Most children and young people enjoy activities and are motivated to complete learning tasks. A majority of learners engage in well-matched activities that provide them with relevant and challenging learning experiences. Learners engage in activities centring on fine motor skills, communication skills, play, and sensory development. However, in most classes, staff need to improve pace and challenge for children and young people. A few children and young people are passively engaged in learning and do not appear to understand or value the purpose of tasks. Teachers need to adopt more creative and imaginative learning activities to stimulate and challenge all children and young people in their learning.
- Almost all children and young people have regular opportunities to choose activities based on their interests and what they enjoy most. Learners often choose activities that they find soothing, comforting, and familiar. Teachers need to provide learners with a broader range of purposeful, relevant, and challenging activities.
- Staff are at the early stages of developing approaches to play. In a few classes, children have a range of role play and structured play activities available. This is supporting children to develop social communication and turn taking skills. A range of outdoor schematic play opportunities are supporting children to engage in more independent and creative experiences. Teachers and early year's practitioners should continue to develop approaches to play across the school taking account of national guidance.
- The school has limited digital technology resources to support learning sufficiently. All classrooms have interactive white boards. In the majority of classes interactive whiteboards are used to play video and project images Children and young people respond with increased engagement when learning is supported by the use of visual displays, photos and videos. Staff should make more effective use of the interactivity and accessibility features of the technology to better engage learning to develop digital skills. A small number of hand held tablets and switches are used effectively to support alternative and augmentative communication however, staff should continue to develop the use of digital communication across the school to support learner interaction and communication.
- All children and young people have an Individualised Education Plan (IEP) that identifies their learning needs and clear targets for literacy and numeracy. Targets are agreed in partnership with parents. Staff use information in IEPs well to support children and young people in their learning. In most classes, targets are prominently displayed in the classroom. Staff now need to ensure that learning targets provide sufficient challenge for all children and young people.
- Overall, across the school, Teachers are responsible for planning termly learning experiences and sharing plans with the relevant staff and parents. Teaching teams plan together where possible and individual termly learning plans and IEP's are shared within class teams. Teachers share daily plans with children and young people who benefit from knowing their routine for the day. Senior leaders review these plans regularly and should now evaluate them to ensure they lead to more challenging activities to better meet the needs of all children and young people.
- Senior leaders have recently implemented approaches to tracking progress across all stages. Foundation milestones, milestones and early level experiences and outcomes in literacy and numeracy are tracked for all learners. Senior leaders have identified how they need to improve these approaches to make to make them more robust.
- Staff have developed outdoor spaces well to include play resources, green spaces and a cycle track. The extended cycle track allows children and young people greater ability to participate in and enjoy physical activities. Staff should continue as planned to develop the outdoor

spaces to better support children and young people to develop further their physical health and wellbeing.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- Staff are in the process of revising the school's curriculum rationale and progression pathways. This will help achieve the ambition of the Carronhill School curriculum providing 'the best curriculum for all our pupils to achieve their highest potential in learning and wellbeing'.
- Senior leaders and staff are working effectively with a range of partners to take forward curriculum development. There is a clear focus on meeting children and young people's needs and improving outcomes for learners. Curriculum development is informed by identified recovery needs and taking account of the milestones for complex learning needs and Curriculum for Excellence. Planned developments such as outdoor learning will further strengthen the refreshed curriculum.
- The school is at the early stages of developing learning pathways in all curriculum areas to raise attainment and provide high quality learning experiences. Numeracy and literacy frameworks are being embedded and beginning to shape experiences relevant to all learners. Staff are beginning to increase their understanding of appropriate numeracy and literacy for children and young people with complex additional support needs. Senior leaders should continue to support staff to progress and implement this work consistently across the school.
- Young people in the senior phase engage in well-planned transition activities to support next steps, including college's visits and placements within adult services. The school should develop further its school-based work placements and leadership opportunities. This will provide learners with more meaningful skills for life and work within a safe, structured environment.
- The school should develop further its partnership with Skills Development Scotland. Staff need to improve how they link the senior phase curriculum to the Careers Scotland Standards (3-18).

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- Almost all parents enjoy positive relationships with the school. Parents speak highly of the welcoming and positive culture established at the school. Parents are actively encouraged and involved in the process of reviewing IEPs and setting targets. Parents are actively involved in key transition planning.
- Almost all staff communicate well with parents in a variety of bespoke ways. However, a few parents feel that there is still a need to develop approaches to communication further. They want to join in more fully with planning for their child's holistic care and learning routines.
- Partnership working with parents has been significantly impacted by the pandemic. The school seeks the views of parents and carers in a variety of ways to support school improvement. In response to their feedback, senior leaders have identified the need to increase levels of parental engagement further.

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. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

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

- The wellbeing of children and young people is embedded in the vision, values, and culture of the school. Staff are very attentive to the wellbeing needs of all children and young people. Relationships across the school are positive and respectful, creating a calm and purposeful learning environment. Staff teams work together well to provide appropriate care and support. As a result, children and young people feel safe, valued, and cared for in the school. Moving forward, children's and young people knowledge of the wellbeing indicators and their rights, should be developed further. This will support children and young people to understand better how they, and important adults, contribute to improving their wellbeing.
- Staff use detailed pupil profiles and support plans effectively to understand children's and young people's individual wellbeing needs. The involvement of parents and partners in the review and development of pupil profiles and plans strengthens staff's knowledge and understanding of individual learners needs. Parental feedback and results of parent questionnaires indicate that most parents feel that staff know their child's needs and support them well.
- Most children and young people consistently show patience, tolerance, and kindness towards each other. Children and young people are supported well to build resilience and remain focused on tasks and learning activities within busy and at time more noisy learning environments. This support is allowing the school community to come together more often to celebrate with each other for example at the weekly whole school assembly. Children and young people are now more able to settle quickly and sustain the time they spend with peers across the whole school.
- Senior leaders and partners support staff's professional learning well. A whole team collegiate approach to learning in the areas of sensory processing and communication is creating a collective understanding of sensory and communication needs. This is leading to, a more effective nurturing, supportive ethos, and culture throughout the school. As a result, children and young people feel supported and safe. Staff are skilled at supporting children and young people to engage successfully with their learning. All learners' behaviour is understood as a form of communication. Most staff are skilled at supporting children and young people when they are anxious or distressed. Monitoring and tracking data illustrates a reduction in the frequency, duration, and impact of distressed behaviour. Children and young people are able to re-engage with learning quickly. Staff should continue to develop total communication approaches. This will support learners to use their preferred method of communication more effectively.
- Attendance across the school is good and there have been no exclusions in the last three years.

- Children receive good levels of care and support. All staff have a good understanding of, and apply, the statutory requirements in relation to child protection. Robust systems and processes are in place to support child protection procedures. Staff participate in training to ensure they have the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the medical and care needs of children and young people.
- All children and young people are regarded as valued members of the school. Staff have a strong focus on equality and inclusion. Individualised IEPs and personalised strategies are in place for children and young people to reduce potential barriers to participation in learning experiences. As a result, the majority of children and young people are fully engaged in their learning. Staff now need to ensure all pupils are fully included in their learning and in decisions about their school.
- Staff have a good understanding of the social and cultural context of children, young people, and their families. They are respectful of the beliefs and traditions of children and young people and their families. Staff recognise and celebrate diversity across the school. Staff plan and deliver curriculum experiences about different festivals, religions, and cultures. Whole school events and assemblies reinforce the importance of diversity. As a result, children and young people know that they are treated as individuals in both the school and the local community.
- Senior leaders provide outreach support to help staff across the authority and community groups understand and meet the needs of children with additional support needs. As a result, children with additional support needs across Aberdeenshire are now more able to access the local community to engage in appropriate learning experiences beyond the school day.
- As part of its recovery curriculum, the school has developed its outdoor spaces well to include play resources, green spaces and a cycle track. The extended cycle track allows children and young people greater ability to participate in and enjoy physical activities. Staff should continue as planned to develop the outdoor spaces further to better support children and young people to develop further their physical health and wellbeing.

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

- Taking account of individual learner profiles, most children and young people are making satisfactory progress in literacy and numeracy. A few learners are making good progress.
- Most children and young people are meeting successfully their literacy and numeracy targets set within their IEPs. Most learners are working well towards achieving foundational milestones and milestones. A minority of learners are working towards achieving early level. Overall, the expectation of what most learners can do is not sufficiently high enough. More children should be working on the higher levels of milestones and into early level. Teachers now need to ensure that targets within IEPs provide all learners with sufficient challenge.

Literacy

Reading and writing

- In reading, most children and young people are beginning to develop their pre-reading and reading skills and are able to show progress from prior levels set within IEP's. However, IEP targets are not sufficiently challenging enough. Most children and young people working at the early stages of milestones can show an interest in a range of sensory stories. They are able to make choices between a range of familiar sensory stories and texts. Most children and young people working at the upper levels of milestones are able to explore a storybook or text in order to find objects and pictures. A few children and young people are able to understand and recognise characters within a story but this is inconsistent across the school. At early level, a few children and young people are able to retell simple stories using objects and pictures. They understand stories and engage in peer-to-peer interactions to help consolidate their reading skills. Most children and young people at the upper levels of milestones and early level need to focus more on developing depth in reading skills and move away from an overreliance on enjoyment and choice experiences. This should include extending the range of text children and young people use in their learning.
- In writing, most children and young people are developing their fine motor, pre writing and writing skills and are able to show progress from prior levels within IEP's however IEP targets are not sufficiently challenging enough. Most children and young people at the foundation milestones are able to use their hands to explore and manipulate objects, and engage in tactile activities. Most children and young people working at the early stages of milestones can hold, grasp and release tools for writing and demonstrate control of preferred tools for writing. They can explore mark making and create simple patterns and sequences. A few children and young people working at the upper levels of milestones can overwrite pre-written shapes and words. They are able to copy, forms shapes and make drawings. At early level, a few children and young people are able to form letters and simple words. A few can write their name on a piece of work. Most children and young people at the upper levels of milestones and early level need

to focus more on organising and using information in writing to raise their attainment further. This should include providing greater opportunity to develop more independent and meaningful skills to support children and young people to conveying a message, sharing their feelings and make choices.

Listening and talking

- Taking account of learners' individual communication profiles, most children and young people are beginning to develop their listening and talking skills and are able to show progress from prior levels. Most children and young people working at foundational milestones can give shared attention to a range of sensory stimulus, objects, and people. They can participate in communication exchanges using preferred methods of communication. Most children and young people working at the early stages of milestones can generate vocalisations and respond to familiar routines. A few children and young people working at the upper levels of milestones can demonstrate an awareness of others by turn taking and using a small number of symbols or words to communicate. A few children and young people working at early level can join in with conversations using preferred modes of communication. They can recount stories using a simple sequence to retell a story. Most children and young people at the upper levels of milestones and early level need to focus more on developing their communication skills. This will ensure that all children and young people are more able to participate in communication exchanges and conversation using their preferred methods of communication.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Most children and young people are developing their numeracy skills and are able to show progress from prior levels. A few children at foundational milestones can follow and track a stimulus when it moves and explore objects using their senses. Most children and young people working at the early stages of milestones can participate in nursery rhymes and songs, which involve an introduction to number. They can demonstrate an awareness of numbers that come next in a familiar sequence. Children and young people working at the upper levels of milestones can use one to one correspondence and use counting to accurately identify "how many". A few children and young people at early level can recall the number sequence forward within 10.
- Most children and young people working at the early stages of milestones can exchange an item for something else. Children and young people working at the upper levels of milestones can sort coins from other coins. A few children and young people working at early level can identify a small number of coins this allows them the opportunity to engage with financial education within the school and community to develop skills for learning life.
- Most children and young people working at the early stages of milestones can explore different items in relation to weight and size through a variety of actions such a filling and emptying. A few children and young people working at early level can take part in water play and baking experiences in which the language of measure and weight are used.
- Most children and young people at all stages take part to varying degrees in activities and games that develop the use of positional language and concepts of movement, position, strength, speed and direction. A minority of children and young people are showing a developing understanding of the properties of two dimensional and three dimensional shapes by stacking, joining, and posting objects and toys. A few children and young people are able to show well developed skills with puzzles and can rotate and test shapes to fit. Most children and young people at the upper levels of milestones and early level need to focus more on developing and using their numeracy and mathematic skills in wider context beyond school. This will better develop their skills for learning, life and work as they move from the broad general education to the senior phase and beyond.

- New progression pathways are supporting teachers to more effectively planned learning in areas of literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics, however, overall the expectation of what most learners can do is not sufficiently high enough. Senior leaders and staff should continue to embed new progression pathways and improve approaches to moderation to ensure all children are provided with the correct level of pace and challenge in their learning. This will provide all learners with increased levels of attainment and build a greater sense of achievement.

Attainment over time

- Most children and young people in the broad general education are making satisfactory progress in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. However, the majority of learners are making limited progress in other areas of the curriculum. There is no clear strategy in place to raise attainment at the broad general education. Teachers' expectations of what children and young people are able to achieve can be too low. Supported by senior leaders, teachers need to develop a shared approach to raising learners' attainment and achievement across the school. They need to collectively place greater emphasis on continuously improving children and young people's outcomes across all areas of the curriculum.
- In recent years, most young people in the senior phase gained a small number of National Qualifications predominantly at National 1. They successfully achieved awards across a range of curriculum areas including literacy, numeracy, science, social studies, and expressive arts. Teachers should now continue to identify challenging, and progressive qualifications and wider awards to more fully accredit children and young people for their achievements.
- The school has limited data to evidence the progress of learners over time. In reviewing a range of personal plans, risk assessments and IEP's small step progress was noted for a few learners. The schools newly introduced tracking framework has the potential to support the school better to gather more robust data to evidence the progress children and young people are making over time.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Children's and young people's achievements are recognised and celebrated effectively across the school. Learners' achievements are shared through digital platforms, weekly assemblies, and 'Stars of the Week'.
- Almost all children and young people engage in a range of valuable learning activities within the local community. These community partnerships were badly affected by COVID-19 mitigations. Senior leaders and staff are successfully re-establishing community links to provide learners with personal achievement activities. Children and young people enjoy visiting local sites of interest. They participate enthusiastically in library visits, gardening at a local allotment and the 'What's for tea?' project. A few learners in the senior phase successfully complete work placements. Staff now need to ensure that learners' emerging skills and attributes are consistently captured and measured over time. Young people should engage in learning activities, which build on their existing achievements.

Equity for all learners

- In recent years, all young people have moved on to further education or training. A few children and young people have transferred successfully to a mainstream school. Senior leaders use PEF effectively to support identified children and young people with their transition upon leaving the school.

- Senior leaders have a clear understanding of the complex additional support needs and socio-economic background of learners at the school. They have identified accurately that the school does not currently have a poverty related attainment gap. Overall, the progress being made by most learners is too low. Senior leaders should work with staff to increase pace and challenge in learning across the school.
- Staff provide targeted, equitable support to help alleviate challenges faced by children and families. As a result, learners' are not disadvantaged by their personal circumstances. Senior leaders now need to monitor effectively the progress being made by cohorts of learners.

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.