

Summarised inspection findings

Castle Douglas Primary School

Dumfries and Galloway Council

27 August 2019

Key contextual information

Castle Douglas Primary School is a non-denominational primary school serving the town of Castle Douglas and the surrounding rural area. There are 13 classes ranging from Primary 1 to Primary 7. There is also a nursery, and a Local Authority Learning Centre to meet the needs of children with a range of moderate learning difficulties. The current school roll in September 2018 was 361 and the nursery has the capacity to accommodate 60 children.

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

- The ethos of the school reflects a strong commitment to children's rights and inclusion for all. "Children are at the heart of all we do" relationships are very positive and, as a result, children are highly motivated, engaged in their learning and are proud of their school. Inclusion is a key feature of the school with almost all of children reporting that the school is helping them to understand and respect other people. Children are developing a strong sense of social responsibility through their work on global goals. Teachers and parents have high aspirations for the children as demonstrated in their work on developing skills for learning life and work. Commendably, this work has been extended to reflect positive destinations of former pupils. Throughout the school, there is a very calm and purposeful learning environment. All staff set and achieve high standards of presentation, and displays of children's work are of very high quality that clearly reflect the curriculum focus. The contribution of children planning learning is clearly identified in the displays.
- Children feel valued and are actively involved in decision making in the school. They have a say in what they want to learn in interdisciplinary learning and teachers work hard to provide relevant and motivating contexts for learning. As a result, across the curriculum, learning is relevant and closely linked to the local context. Regular opportunities for learning outdoors is a key feature of the school. Starting at primary 1, children engage in the Forest Schools programme, developing resilience and an appreciation of nature. Across the stages and throughout the year, teachers provide well planned and regular opportunities to learn outdoors.
- Overall, the quality of teaching is good with a few examples of very good practice. In most lessons observed, the pace of learning was good, however, in a few lessons the pace was too slow. Most teachers use differentiation well to ensure the right level of support and as a result, tasks and activities meet the needs of most children. In the best examples, teachers are providing additional challenge for children. As planned, all teachers now need to work together to ensure there is a consistent approach to providing increased challenge for children who require greater challenge in their learning.
- Across the school, teachers use a variety of approaches including whole class direct teaching, opportunities for children learn individually, in pairs and in small groups. Most children

understand their roles and responsibilities for learning in groups and as a result, their work is of high quality.

- The majority of children are developing a strong sense of awareness of their strengths and what they need to do to improve through effective feedback from teachers.
- Senior leaders conduct regular, formal, classroom observations to measure progress and evaluate the quality of learning and teaching and share findings with the staff team. As a result, aspects for development are clearly identified and supported. In addition, the senior leaders are highly visible in the school and as a result, ongoing and appropriate assessment of progress and discussion on standards is a regular feature. Teachers work very well together and actively seek advice and support from colleagues and senior leaders. They engage readily in ongoing professional dialogue with senior managers. They should now, as planned, work with colleagues outwith the school to improve the consistency of learning and teaching across the school. Teachers liaise well with learning assistants and as a result, children benefit from appropriate additional support.
- Digital technology is developing across the school. The recent introduction of tablets is enabling children to record their learning in a variety of ways. As this work develops, teachers are proactive in teaching children about internet safety. Teachers make good use of interactive white boards to engage the children in developing their digital skills through motivating software packages.
- There is a useful system for electronic curricular planning and senior leaders provide strong leadership and direction. This approach is not overly bureaucratic, provides very helpful guidance and support to teachers, and provides a valuable overview of progress. The recent inclusion of the national benchmarks across all curricular areas is contributing to teachers' understanding of the curriculum and how progress should be assessed. Curriculum planning is shared effectively across the school, enabling all teachers to contribute. As a result, links across learning are clearly identified and more meaningful for children.
- Teachers engage well with senior leaders in challenging professional dialogue at termly planning and tracking meetings focused on the progress of children. Assessment results and evidence of learning are discussed in detail and, where progress is less than expected interventions and support are identified and provided. There is scope to introduce more robust evaluation of interventions in order to improve outcomes for children.
- A blend of approaches is used to gather the evidence of progress. Across the school, teachers are skilled in analysing and interpreting data and have a good understanding of progress. They work well together to ensure that learning is planned to match the needs of each child. Children engage in regular self and peer assessment. At key points, results from standardised assessments contribute to teacher's professional judgement. The results of ongoing assessment of progress in reading is used well to ensure children are reading books at the correct level of challenge. Teachers report that as a result of increased collaborative working and professional learning opportunities, their professional judgement of achievement of a level is more robust. The quality assurance and moderation officer (QAMSO) engages well with colleagues to improve the assessment of progress in science and mathematics. Standards in writing are moderated shared with other schools. As planned, teachers should now work together on holistic assessments to reflect children's progress across the curriculum.

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

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

- Overall children are making good progress in literacy and English, and satisfactory progress in numeracy and mathematics.
- Evidence for the last few years provided by the school, demonstrates that overall, most children have achieved appropriate levels in literacy and numeracy at each stage. For children who have additional barriers to learning, staff are using data effectively to plan for next steps in their learning. Staff are developing confidence in using data to improve judgements about children's progress.

Attainment over time

- The headteacher provided attainment predictions for June 2019 and overall, these predictions are realistic and generally accurate. The current school attainment data indicates that overall attainment in literacy and numeracy is improving. Data provided by the school from session 2017/18 shows that most children are making appropriate progress in reading, writing and numeracy and almost all in listening and talking at early level. Most children are making appropriate progress in reading, writing and listening and talking and the majority in numeracy at first level. At second level, most children are making appropriate progress in reading and the majority in writing, listening and talking and numeracy. The predicted figure for children achieving numeracy at first level would be the highest level of attainment in four years and we discussed with senior leaders the need to continue to closely monitor numeracy attainment at first level. Senior leaders should ensure that predicted increases and decreases in attainment are fully investigated during attainment discussions with class teachers.
- The accelerated reading programme has had a positive impact on children's attainment across all stages with most children attaining at the appropriate level. A number of resources including an online maths resources are currently being piloted to support the teaching of numeracy. We discussed with senior leaders the need to continue to focus upon pedagogy when introducing new resources, ensuring that these approaches improve attainment.
- The headteacher in consultation with staff has developed a tracking and monitoring system which has the potential to track attainment across all curricular areas. Staff are becoming more confident in making professional judgements by using the National Benchmarks, the Scottish National Standardised Assessments and in-house class assessments. They are involved in moderation activities in school and are supported well by the local authority. This is increasing their confidence in making professional judgements.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, children's attainment in reading, writing and listening and talking is good. A few children are making very good progress at each level. A few are working beyond the expected levels. The impact of the school's strategies to raise attainment in literacy is becoming evident,

with improvement in attainment in reading. Children need to develop further their skills in writing.

Listening and talking

- Children's progress in listening and talking is good across the school. Children are articulate and respectful to adults and to each other. They listen well to instructions from class teachers and interact positively with each other when working collaboratively on activities. At early level, almost all children enjoy listening to different texts and engage well, showing developing questioning skills. At first level, most children give oral presentations and identify appropriate feedback for improvement for their peers. At second level, the majority of children ask and respond to evaluative questions, with a knowledge of techniques to engage the listener. Across the school, the children need to develop further their skills in listening and talking.

Reading

- Overall, children's progress in reading is good. Children demonstrate an enthusiasm for reading and use the new library environment. Children are engaging well with a range of texts across learning, supported by the work of the reading ambassadors who successfully promote reading for enjoyment. At early level, most children can use their knowledge of sounds, letters and patterns to read words. At first level, most children can identify their favourite authors and their style of writing. They read fluently and with expression. At second level, children can summarise texts, making relevant comments about setting and characterisation as well as the main ideas of the book. Children at second level use e-readers to engage with a wider range of authors and more recent publications. Children now need to continue to build on this increasingly successful foundation to further their skills in reading.

Writing

- Overall, children's progress in writing is good. Children's standards of written presentation are high throughout the school and overall they / most are accurate in spelling. At early level, most children are developing their skills in letter formation and can write simple sentences using capital letters and full stops. They need to extend the range of genres in writing. At first and second levels, children's writing is improving. At second level, children write well for a range of purposes for example producing an informative leaflet on global warming. Across the school, children need to continue to develop and improve their writing skills.

Overall attainment in numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, most children at early level and the majority of children across first and second level are making satisfactory progress in numeracy and mathematics. A few children across the school are making good progress and exceeding national expected levels. There has been a focus on the development of mental maths calculation. Improvements in children's mental agility and discussions around strategies for solving problems is improving numeracy attainment. To improve attainment further identifying effective approaches to differentiating in the classroom and sharing these more widely across all classes is required.

Number, money measurement

- At early level, most children can identify numbers and count forwards within a range of 0-20. A few children are confident with numbers beyond 20, can count backwards and can identify missing numbers in a sequence. At first level, the majority of children can answer calculations, involving the four operations, with accuracy and explain their reasoning behind using particular strategies. The majority can use the correct notation for common fractions. All children require more experience in comparing the size of fractions and ordering these. At second level, the majority of children can round to the nearest 1000, 10 000 and 100 000 and demonstrate a good understanding of place value. The majority can calculate a simple percentage and

fraction of a quantity. Children' now need to develop the ability to apply their numeracy skills through investigations and real life contexts.

Shape, position and movement

- Most children at early level recognise, describe and sort common 2D shapes. Most children can understand and use the language of position and direction through programmable technologies. At first level, the majority of children can identify and describe 3D objects and 2D shapes using appropriate vocabulary. They can create and make models to demonstrate their knowledge. At second level, the majority of children can use mathematical language to describe a range of angles. Most would benefit from further practise calculating complementary and supplementary angles.

Information handling

- At early level, most children interpret simple graphs, such as eye colour, and can apply counting skills to answer questions based on the information. Children across first level regularly gather information and produce simple graphs and charts. Their use of appropriate vocabulary of probability to describe the likelihood of simple events is developing. At second level, the majority of children are able to interpret and draw conclusions from information they have displayed in a variety of forms, including digital. The children show an interest in investigating the ideas of chance and uncertainty. They need to further their progress in developing their vocabulary of probability.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Children are proud of their achievements which arise from a wide range of school and wider achievement opportunities. Children from across the school are developing as responsible citizens through involvement the Global Gang group. This group is raising awareness of pollution and litter in the local and global environment. Across the school, participation in Pupil Council, Show Club and Playground Managers is helping children to work effectively as an individual and as part of a team. These school groups also provide leadership roles for children across school. There is the potential to further develop leadership skills, for example, chairing pupil council meetings, setting the agenda for school group meetings and taking minutes of meetings.
- Children's achievements are celebrated well in a number of ways. These include; Accelerated Reading Wall Display, Weekly News, Achievement Assemblies and Pupil of the Month awards. Children are keen to share their achievements and are given the opportunity to choose the 'Pupil of the Month.' Wider achievement involvement is tracked and features in the end of session Report to Parents. We discussed with the SLT the potential for tracking the skills obtained during these activities and linking these to the Skills for Learning , Life and Work. There is also scope to investigate opportunities for accreditation from the wide range of wider achievements on offer.
- The school has developed strong partnerships with a number of organisations in the local community which help support children to achieve with their learning. For example, links with local businesses, National Trust for Scotland (Threave Gardens), Historic Scotland (Threave Castle) and the Forestry Commission are supporting children in their learning in science, technology and health and wellbeing. These partnerships are creating effective and unfamiliar contexts for learning and provide children with the opportunity to make connections between learning in the classroom and the real world. Children speak very positively about these experiences and a few can discuss the skills they have acquired.

Equity for all learners

- Teachers across the school strive to promote equity across learning for all children in an inclusive ethos. They know the children, families and socio-economic context of the local area well. Relationships across the school are positive and inclusion is embedded into practice.
- Senior leaders track all children's progress in literacy and numeracy. This information is then used to support identified individuals and groups to reduce or remove potential barriers to learning. Senior leaders should continue to complete robust and rigorous self-evaluation to ensure the impact of each targeted intervention is helping to close the attainment gap.
- The school is in receipt of Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) and senior leaders direct this spending to areas identified through self-evaluation. PEF allocation is also being used to provide additional pupil support assistants to support targeted interventions with children, for example nurture groups. The school can evidence focused work and spending in literacy has increased reading for enjoyment across all stages and is beginning to have a positive impact on children's progress and attainment from prior levels.
- The school provides a carefully considered range of activities to encourage whole family participation in learning such as 'Stay for a Sound', forest activities and links to numeracy supports on the school website. A variety of clubs and trips are offered to children and the school ensures cost is not a barrier to all children being able to participate.

Practice worth sharing more widely

Relevant Curricular Skills development (QI 2.3 first bullet point)

Learning, engagement and inclusion for School and Learning Centre

School

Inclusion is a key feature of the school with almost all of children reporting that the school is helping them to understand and respect other people. Children are developing a strong sense of social responsibility through their work on global goals.

Children engage in regular self, peer assessment, and make good use of teacher feedback to improve their work. At key points, results from standardised assessments contribute to teacher's professional judgement. The results of ongoing assessment of progress in reading is used well to ensure children are reading books at the correct level of challenge.

Children have a say in what they want to learn in interdisciplinary learning and teachers work hard to provide relevant and motivating contexts for learning. As a result, across the curriculum, learning is relevant and closely linked to the local context. Children report that they feel valued in the school. Regular opportunities for learning outdoors is a key feature of the school. Starting at primary 1, children engage in the Forest Schools programme, developing resilience and an appreciation of nature. Across the stage and throughout the year, well planned and regular opportunities to learn outdoors are provided.

Learning Centre

The ethos of the Learning Centre is very much centred on inclusion. Led effectively by the principal teacher, all the Learning Centre staff demonstrate great sensitivity towards children and are very skilled at providing high quality support to the learners. Relationships between staff and children are very positive. Communication passports provide useful information to help staff to provide the right support at the right time. Across the school, all staff know the children, their needs and individual circumstances very well, and there is a clear commitment to including them in the life of the school. As well as learning in mainstream classes, children join in playtimes and social events and are treated with dignity and respect by their peers. As a result children are happy and engaged in their learning at Castle Douglas.

Context

The Learning Centre at Castle Douglas Primary School is a Local Authority provision for children with additional support needs from the Castle Douglas, Kirkcudbright, Dalbeattie and Dalry area. Almost all children placed in the Learning Centre are in mainstream classes full-time, with the addition of bespoke targeted supports tailored to their individual needs. At the time of inspection, there were 18 children in the Learning Centre. A few children are on shared placements with their own mainstream school.

QI 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

- The ethos of the Learning Centre is very much centred on inclusion. Led effectively by the principal teacher, all the Learning Centre staff demonstrate great sensitivity towards children and are very skilled at providing high quality support to the learners. Relationships between staff and children are very positive. Communication passports provide useful information to help staff to provide the right support at the right time. Across the school, all staff know the children, their needs and individual circumstances very well, and there is a clear commitment to including them in the life of the school. As well as learning in mainstream classes, children join in playtimes and social events and are treated with dignity and respect by their peers. As a result, children are happy and engaged in their learning at Castle Douglas. Staff should continue to encourage children to be as independent as possible, encouraging them to take responsibilities as appropriate.
- The principal teacher and learning assistants work very closely with mainstream teaching colleagues. Targets in individual education plans (IEPs) are clear, and teachers use these to plan learning experiences which are well-matched to children's needs. Staff make effective use of a range of environments and technology to support learning experiences. As well as making use of the Centre's facilities, this includes learning outdoors and in real and relevant contexts in the local community. Explanations and instructions are clear, with effective use of visual symbols and prompts as required. Staff are very responsive and skilled at distraction and de-escalation techniques, and commendably have rarely needed to use any physical intervention or seclusion over the past 2 years.
- Children's progress is reviewed regularly through appropriate planning meetings, and teachers plan appropriately over different timescales. Where possible, children are involved in meetings to discuss their progress. Teachers monitor the progress of most children in literacy and numeracy through Curriculum for Excellence levels using the school's tracking system. We have discussed with senior leaders how they can further develop this to better evidence progress of children working at pre-early level over time.

QI 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

- Overall children in the Learning Centre are making appropriate progress in literacy and numeracy, given their significant barriers to learning and additional support needs. The majority are working within early level with a few working at pre-early and first level. A few children in the upper stages are experiencing aspects of second level work. A few are making very good progress and are on track to achieve second level in reading and writing.
- In literacy, the majority of children perform better in reading and writing than in listening and talking. A few children working at pre-early level are exploring sounds of language and enjoy listening to stories. They are using symbols and pictures to make choices between a few objects, and can sort them into a simple order. They are beginning to make marks and recognise that writing is used to convey meaning. Children working towards early level can retell familiar stories using role play, puppets and drawings. They are learning to form lowercase and uppercase letters correctly and to use capital letters and full stops. Older children working towards first level, are able to listen and respond appropriately to the views of others and contribute to group discussions. They are developing their ability to spell common words and start sentences in different ways. Children now need to continue to make progress in all aspects of their literacy.
- There is good evidence of most children developing their numeracy skills through a range of active learning experiences, including learning outdoors and in the community. Visual timetables help children at pre-early level to understand daily routines and the sequence of events. They are learning to recognise familiar numbers and to sort items by size and amount. Most children working within early level are developing an understanding of number and to group objects into equal parts. They are learning the value of coins and to recognise common 2D shapes. Older children are learning how to pay for things in real life situations, such as buying ingredients at the shops for cooking recipes. Children's skills in numeracy and mathematics need to be continued to be developed through relevant, real-life and meaningful contexts.
- There is scope to improve tracking of children's progress and achievements over time. We have discussed this with senior leaders, including making use of Education Scotland's milestones to support learners with complex additional support needs and better tracking of IEP targets over time.
- Children's achievements are celebrated regularly. Daily diaries and digital technology are used to communicate with parents and carers. In addition, assemblies, weekly news and social media celebrate children's successes and achievements. The school now need to consider other ways to accredit achievements and support children in an appropriate way to understand how their achievements link with the world of work.
- Staff know the children and their families well and work closely with parents, carers and partners to meet needs. This effective partnership working is successfully ensuring equity of success and raising attainment for almost all children placed in the Learning Centre. Whilst many children remain on the roll of Castle Douglas rather than returning to their mainstream school, effective transition arrangements are in place for those who want to return to their own school. Senior leaders should continue to plan transitions carefully. Together with the local authority, they should regularly review the support for a few children who are not in school full-time to ensure timeous return to their entitlement to full-time 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.