

Summarised inspection findings

St Helen's Primary School

North Lanarkshire Council

20 January 2026

Key contextual information

St Helen's Primary School is a denominational school located in Condorrat, Cumbernauld. At the time of inspection, the school roll was 221 children working across 10 classes. The headteacher has been in post since 2016. She is supported by three part-time principal teachers who work the equivalent of two full-time principal teachers. The headteacher also has responsibility for the nursery class, which is part of the school.

A quarter of children require additional support with their learning and a few children are entitled to free school meals. Across the school, a few children reside in quintile 1 of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) data zones. Just under half of the school roll lives in deciles 7 to 10 with just over a third living in deciles 4 to 6.

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

- As a result of the strong and highly effective leadership of the headteacher, all staff have developed a nurturing and inclusive ethos across the school. There are highly respectful and positive relationships between staff and children and children and their peers. Children talk confidently about the caring and supportive culture across the school with almost all children feeling safe and secure. This results in a very calm and inclusive culture which supports very effectively the learning across the school. Children, staff and families feel a strong sense of belonging to the school and are proud to be part of the St Helen's family.
- Adults place a high value on the opinions and views of children and in turn, children listen attentively and respectfully to adults. Children's behaviour across the school is exemplary. They are kind and caring towards their peers. Adults sensitively support children to have a strong understanding of others' differences and how they can support their peers who face challenges. Children who face barriers to their learning confidently share their difficulties and experiences with their peers at assemblies. This supportive school culture helps children take responsibility for helping each other in their learning. Children articulate very well how their views are sought and acted upon. They recognise that their contributions help to improve the school and their learning experiences. This ethos of mutual respect aligns with the strong understanding of the school values which are underpinned by the school's Catholic faith and use of the Gospel values.
- Across the school almost all children are highly engaged and motivated learners. Children sustain their concentration very well on tasks and activities. All children work very effectively both independently and in groups, displaying very well-developed skills in communication, collaboration and cooperation. Older children are skilled, responsible learners who lead learning for younger children in modern languages.

- Teachers are a reflective team and work very well together to develop their practice. They take responsibility for undertaking professional learning to improve the consistency of learning and teaching across the school. As a result of this sustained approach, teachers share clearly the purpose of learning and use clear explanations and instructions in almost all lessons. They use task boards in literacy and numeracy effectively, supporting children well to complete tasks independently without the need for adult support and intervention. In a minority of highly effective examples, teachers use skilfully children's commentary about their learning to help children understand how they will be successful. These high-quality discussions between teachers and children help children talk confidently about the skills they develop through planned learning. Older children reflect accurately on the skills they would need to carry out different roles and careers successfully. Teachers are in a strong place to share this effective practice more widely. This should help to enhance further children's understanding of the skills needed to be successful in learning, life and work.
- In most literacy and numeracy lessons, teachers plan tasks and activities matched well to almost all children's needs and abilities. In a few highly effective examples, teachers deliver brief introductions and direct teaching to groups of children to meet effectively their learning needs. As a team, teachers should review their approach to whole class lessons and introductions. They now need to increase the pace of learning and challenge for their most able children. This should allow all children to receive the right level of challenge in their work across the curriculum and apply their learning more widely across different contexts.
- In almost all lessons, teachers use questioning well to check children's understanding and to build on their prior learning. A minority of teachers are highly skilled at using questioning techniques to extend children's thinking and deepen their learning. In these examples, children confidently share their thinking and reasons for their decisions and answers. Teachers are developing their approaches to providing feedback, both written and oral. Most older children review previous work before their new task to ensure they build upon the feedback given. As a result, most children talk confidently about their learning. As teachers continue to embed these approaches, they should refine the content of feedback to provide children with clear information on their next steps.
- Teachers have increased the number of approaches they use to enhance the curriculum. Children use digital devices confidently to practise new learning and research information. They develop their digital skills successfully in coding and programming using a range of technologies. Teachers plan well a balance of technology to enhance children's learning and plan opportunities to teach digital skills discretely. This results in children skilfully using technology to support their learning. Teachers in the lower school have created a bright and engaging space for children to play. This playroom allows children in P1 to P3 to have time to practise their social and communication skills with their peers. They enjoy the opportunities for sensory and exploratory play. Teachers are at the early stages of this development and recognise the need to ensure resources meet the needs of children at different stages. As teachers refine their approach, they should consider how to plan for high-quality learning through play across the day to allow children to apply learning in different contexts.
- Senior leaders deploy support staff effectively to help meet the needs of children with additional support needs. Teaching staff provide effective additional support to children, both individually and in groups, which has led to improved outcomes for almost all learners who receive this support. Support staff work effectively to help children engage in learning and participate in the daily routines of life in school. Staff at all levels have a strong understanding of children's learning needs and support them with empathy, patience and understanding.

- Overall, teachers' approaches to assessment help them understand the progress children make in their learning. They plan a wide range of weekly, termly and annual summative and standardised assessments in literacy and numeracy. They use these valid assessments to inform their judgements on children's attainment and to identify next steps in literacy and numeracy. They gather a comprehensive range of data from these assessments to ensure they do not miss key information about children's progress. This helps staff respond promptly to the needs of children across the school. Teachers are at the early stages of planning and using high-quality assessments which combine different curricular areas. As planned, teachers should develop these regularly to allow children to demonstrate application of skills and knowledge in new and unfamiliar contexts.
- Senior leaders support teachers very well to develop their knowledge of the national standards of children's attainment. As a result, teachers engage effectively in a wide range of moderation activities. For example, teachers recently liaised with cluster colleagues to moderate high-quality assessments. This, and the verification of the standard of children's work, is improving the validity and reliability of evidence. Teachers' confidence in judgements about the progress children make has increased as a result.
- Teachers plan effectively over different timescales. Senior leaders and teachers have recently streamlined their approach to planning. Teachers use the revised school planning format effectively to ensure appropriate planning of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) experiences and outcomes using agreed progression pathways. They plan learning which ensures children develop appropriate knowledge, skills and attributes. Teachers use and understand data well to inform their planning for children's next steps and appropriate interventions. Most teachers plan learning at the right level for almost all children in literacy and numeracy. Teachers seek children's views on what they would like to learn about a topic. There is scope to involve children more fully in planning aspects of their learning.
- Senior leaders have introduced a robust approach to track and monitor children's learning. They meet with teachers three times a year to discuss the attainment, progress and health and wellbeing of all children. These meetings support teachers to plan programmes of learning that meet children's needs. Staff use a 'fact, story, action' approach, using a wide range of assessment information, to identify children who require additional support or challenge. Senior leaders work closely with teachers to engage with national Benchmarks and identify the reasons why individual children are not achieving. They use this information to plan appropriate interventions and support to meet individual children's needs. Staff monitor closely the impact of these interventions. Teachers, with support from senior leaders, have improved their skills in interrogating data to track the progress of individuals, cohorts and groups of children. This has enhanced their knowledge of the children and the progress they make as a result of planned learning. It also supports them to target support for cohorts of learners, such as those who require additional support or are impacted by poverty. Senior leaders should now consider streamlining the ways in which they record children's attainment to clearly evidence progress for individuals over time.

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

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Overall, children's attainment in literacy and numeracy is good. In listening and talking, children's attainment is very good. Most children achieve nationally expected levels in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics. A few children are exceeding their expected progress in literacy and numeracy. Most children who require additional support make good progress towards their individual targets.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, most children make good progress in reading and writing. Almost all children make very good progress in listening and talking.

Listening and talking

- Across all stages, almost all children speak well and articulate their thoughts and views. At early level, almost all children take turns and offer their own ideas and opinions. They use their listening and talking skills to generate a rhyme from given words. They share their favourite stories and use terms such as title and author appropriately. At first level, almost all children identify the features of effective listening and talking. They describe accurately the skills they need to deliver a solo talk, and use appropriate terminology, such as body language, pace and voice projection. Within second level, almost all children skilfully articulate their thoughts, feelings and opinions. They use their listening and talking skills effectively to support each other's learning and describe how they will use these skills for learning, life and work.

Reading

- Most children at early level are building effectively their skills in early reading. They use their developing knowledge of letters and sounds to read simple words. They decode familiar texts well. At first level, most children read with expression. They describe the key features of a text and confidently describe attributes of main characters in a story. They make accurate predictions of plot and use inference skills appropriate to their level. Most children working at second level describe different genres in reading and give examples of preferred texts. They interpret key themes in the novels they are reading, appropriate to their level. Children at all levels now need support to apply reading skills more widely and across the curriculum to deepen and extend their skills.

Writing

- At early level, most children make good attempts to write simple words using their knowledge of letters and sounds. They are beginning to form letters accurately. Children working at early level would benefit from further opportunities to explore and extend their writing through play experiences. At first level, most children are beginning to write extended pieces using

appropriate vocabulary, punctuation and grammar. They use their knowledge of phonics and spelling strategies successfully when spelling familiar and unfamiliar words. They link written sentences well using a range of conjunctions. Most children working at second level write across a range of genres. For example, children write reports and narrative texts well. They use figurative language such as similes and alliteration to engage the reader. Children at first and second levels should be given more opportunities to apply their writing skills across a wider range of real-life contexts.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, most children make good progress in numeracy and mathematics. They should now be given more support to apply their skills in different contexts and revisit taught learning on a regular basis.

Number, money and measure

- Almost all children at early level identify and recognise numbers from 0 to 20. They identify successfully the number before, the number after and missing numbers in a sequence. They should continue to be supported to form numerals correctly. At first level, most children accurately round whole numbers to the nearest 10 and 100. They count forward and backwards in twos, fives and tens. They are not yet confident in working with fractions. Most children at second level accurately add and subtract 10, 100 and 1000 to and from whole numbers. They calculate accurately the area of squares and rectangles. They need support to develop their knowledge of equivalent forms of common fractions, decimal fractions and percentages.

Shape, position and movement

- Almost all children at early level recognise common two-dimensional (2D) shapes. They identify and create accurately symmetrical pictures with one line of symmetry. They are not yet secure at identifying and describing simple three-dimensional (3D) objects. Most children at first level know and use the compass points, North, South, East and West. They name, identify and classify a range of simple 2D shapes. They are less confident with naming 3D objects. Most children at second level use mathematical language correctly to describe and classify different angles. They are not yet familiar with the diameter and radius of circles.

Information handling

- At early level, almost all children accurately read pictorial graphs where one object represents one data value. At first level, most children interpret information in a pictograph and answer associated questions. Most children at second level identify different ways to display data. They use the language of probability accurately to describe the likelihood of simple events occurring. Across the school, all children would benefit from support to develop further their understanding of information handling through relevant contexts. At first and second levels, children should be encouraged to use digital technology to record and display information.

Attainment over time

- The school's attendance figures are consistently above local and national averages. Senior leaders are proactive in encouraging high levels of attendance. The headteacher takes brisk, effective action to support families and children whose attendance dips.
- Overall, most children make good progress in learning over time. Senior leaders have established a range of systems to monitor the progress of cohorts, classes and individuals in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing over time. Children's progress is tracked using a wide range of robust assessment information to support teachers' judgements. Teaching staff

make effective use of attainment data to inform the planning of next steps in learning to meet children's needs.

- Senior leaders provide effective support to teaching staff to interpret trends in data. As a result, they have identified that children's attainment dips at first level. They have introduced approaches such as play and interventions to improve children's progress at first level. With support from senior leaders, teachers should continue to review these approaches. They should continue to refine classroom experiences to ensure all children receive consistently the right level of challenge. This should help to sustain children's progress and mitigate against future dips in attainment.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Almost all children achieve well through participation in a range of activities and experiences which lead to wider achievement. This includes lunchtime and after school clubs. For example, children experience clubs in football, dance and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Children speak enthusiastically and articulately about the skills they are developing through these planned activities.
- As children progress through the school, they develop effective leadership skills to support the delivery of lunchtime activities, such as the dance club. Older children support younger children as buddies and work well together to support the teaching and learning of Italian in younger classes.
- Children contribute positively to the community through their partnership with the local church. Children, parents and staff value this partnership. This is helping children further develop a sense of responsibility and a deeper understanding of the Catholic faith.
- Almost all children effectively contribute to the life and work of the school through committees, pupil voice groups and assemblies. Children and staff value "community Fridays" as an opportunity to meaningfully develop their skills as successful learners and effective contributors. Senior leaders track children's participation in and out of school. They use this information effectively to target individual children to ensure that all children achieve well.

Equity for all learners

- Senior leaders and staff know the socio-economic context of the community well. Staff maintain a clear focus on the ways in which they can support families to meet the cost of the school day. This includes operating a uniform "pre-loved, re-loved" scheme for families. School events are affordable and accessible to all and no child misses out due to costs. School staff work sensitively to reduce any financial barriers for families.
- The headteacher uses Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) to provide increased staffing to help children who require additional support in their learning. Together, staff work effectively in partnership to plan and deliver interventions which support children's progress. The headteacher uses a range of data to measure the impact of these interventions. As a result, good progress is being made to reduce the attainment gap.

Other relevant evidence

- Children experience two hours of high-quality physical education weekly.
- The headteacher consults parents through the Parent Council annually on the use of PEF. She shares the school's approach more widely with all parents during an annual curriculum event. She welcomes feedback from parents and uses this information to influence decisions on the use of PEF.
- The school has strong links with the local parish. Children are highly valued by the community and parish and are encouraged to take part in Mass on a regular basis. Children deliver readings, carry out important duties and support the community by singing and performing for the parishioners. These important roles help to develop children's confidence and leadership skills.
- Children have regular access to the school library and class libraries. They enjoy visiting the school library and engage in purposeful activities when there. This helps them link their learning to reading for enjoyment. Children across the school have a strong understanding of genre, authors and talk enthusiastically about their favourite books. This approach is helping children develop important reading habits and to be enthusiastic readers.
- All children learn Italian, with senior pupils taking on leadership roles as Italian ambassadors. They visit classes regularly to share key vocabulary with children across the school. Younger children look forward to these visits and enjoy learning from their peers in P7. Older children also learn French to meet the entitlement of 1+2 modern languages as part of the school's curricular offer.

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.