Summarised inspection findings

Mary Russell School

Renfrewshire Council

21 January 2020

Key contextual information

Mary Russell School is a specialist provision providing education from P1 to S6 for children and young people with additional support needs. At the time of the inspection, the school roll was 188, of which 47 are in the primary department. The majority of children and young people live within Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) one and two.

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

■ Across the school, children and young people benefit from a positive learning environment and caring culture. This provides a calm, settled ethos for learning. Children and young people respond well to the warm welcome that they receive entering classrooms. Staff use their detailed knowledge of children and their families to develop nurturing relationships. They use praise well, and consistently encourage learners to do their best. As a result, most children and young people are motivated and enjoy being in school. They show high levels of confidence and feel safe and well looked after.

■ In most classes, relevant, engaging learning experiences are well matched to children's and young people's interests. At the early stages in the primary department, children enthusiastically learn through well-planned opportunities for play. Throughout the school, learning using real-life contexts keeps children and young people engaged in tasks and activities. In a few lessons, where learners are highly motivated, they lead their own learning. On these occasions, they work very effectively in pairs and small groups. In the majority of lessons, the balance of high expectations, challenge and enjoyment is evident.

■ The recently revised learning, teaching and assessment policy provides clear direction for high quality learning and teaching across the school. Department heads oversee the implementation of the policy and work well together to share good practice. The recent introduction of the '10-step approach to a Mary Russell lesson' is beginning to support teachers to deliver high quality learning and teaching. Across the school, the majority of learning activities provide appropriate pace and challenge for children and young people. For a few children and young people, learning is not set at the appropriate level and is over-directed by staff, which slows down progress.

■ In the post-16 Step Unit, almost all young people participate well in well-planned, supportive learning experiences. These meet their needs and aspirations and build their self-esteem and confidence as they learn important life skills. For example, through regular involvement with a local care home, young people work well with residents to plan, organise and provide a range of social activities.

■ Teachers' use of digital technologies, such as interactive boards, enhances learning experiences and provides stimuli for class discussions. For example, the use of an engaging

music video clip with thought-provoking lyrics provided a stimulus for young people to discuss child slavery in the 21st century. In technology and art, learners use digital technologies very effectively to support their learning and aid communication. The school recognises the value of these resources and plans to improve further the use of digital technologies across the school.

■ Across the school, learning takes account of each individual's personal, social and emotional needs. Most staff make appropriate judgements about learner's progress through the effective use of summative and formative assessment information. As a result, differentiation is well planned in most lessons. Most teachers use questioning techniques well to engage children and young people and help assess their progress with their learning. Most teachers discuss the purpose of lessons and revisit this at appropriate times, checking for learner's understanding. A few departments use learning logs well. In these departments, whole class curriculum targets set by the teacher allow children and young people to record their own progress. For a minority of learners, greater discussion about what success looks like should be provided.

■ Staff understanding of expected standards has improved through their participation in moderation activities. They moderate internally across the primary and secondary departments and externally with neighbouring schools. Focused learning conversations take place between learners, staff and parents. These inform effectively the planning and review of individual education plans in the primary department and learning plans in the secondary department.

■ The school produces a wide range of assessment data to inform next steps in learning. A more manageable approach to gathering and analysing assessment data should be developed. This will enable staff to use data more effectively to inform planned learning and teaching and ensure all learners make the best possible progress.

■ Staff use a number of planning frameworks and curriculum overviews appropriately to inform children's and young people's personalised targets. Learners' progress with their targets is monitored at agreed points during the session through discussion between teachers and senior leaders. The school needs to take greater account of information recorded within children's and young people's learning logs and learning plans. This will support children and young people to make better progress as a result of planned interventions. Staff need to streamline the number and use of curriculum targets within children's and young people's plans.

■ The school's broad general education tracking system, which includes participation in wider achievement activities, provides effective analysis of individuals and identified groups, such as care-experienced learners. The school is well placed to develop a whole school tracking system incorporating both the broad general education and senior phase. Senior leaders should review approaches to planning, tracking and monitoring across the broad general education. A few staff are not yet confident in implementing existing approaches.

■ The application of the local authority's planning and assessment approach effectively tracks children's and young people's progress within numeracy. It provides a coherent pathway through the broad general education. This clarity about children's and young people's prior learning helps identify learners' next steps. The school should develop this approach across other areas of the curriculum. By so doing, coherence and progression across the whole curriculum will be improved.

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 attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Taking account of their additional support needs, data provided by the school shows that most children and young people are making appropriate progress from their prior levels of attainment in literacy and communication and numeracy and mathematics.

- By the end of P7, the majority of young people achieve the early level of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), in literacy and communication. A few achieve the first level in reading. In numeracy and mathematics, most young people achieve the early level. By the end of S3, the majority of young people achieve the first level of CfE in literacy and communication and a few achieve the second level. In numeracy and mathematics, most young people achieve the first level by the end of S3.

- Staff take part in regular moderation activities to support a shared understanding of standards. The school is providing information about the progress of different groups of learners, including those from different socio-economic groups and those who are care experienced. Staff need to continue to develop their approaches to tracking and monitoring to ensure they produce reliable evidence of children's and young people's progress within the broad general education.

Literacy and communication
Primary

- Across the primary department, most children are making good progress in language and communication. The introduction of additional reading resources and targeted support for reading and communication are beginning to improve children's attainment.

- At the early stages, children share their opinions about books they like and those they wish to have in the library. A few can identify initial sounds. Most children are enthusiastic about opportunities to read and listen to stories. They can make choices between texts and express their views clearly. In the upper primary, most children can read well. They can work with a partner to research facts about a given topic. Digital technology effectively supports children to access texts.

- In the lower primary stages, children are improving their communication through the effective use of play-based learning, pictures, symbols and visual cues. Most children use language well to explain what makes them happy, sad and angry. A few can identify and write lower case letters. Most children at the middle and upper primary stages use writing templates well to help them to structure and extend their writing. They can use initial sounds to generate words. In P7, almost all children demonstrate skills in researching weather and climate using digital technology to assist reading. A few can share the results of their research with peers.

Secondary

- At all stages, almost all young people demonstrate respectful attitudes when listening to their teacher and each other in lessons, group discussions and when working in pairs. At the senior phase, most make confident contributions when working collaboratively with peers.

- Most young people at the lower secondary stages are able to read simple sentences independently. They are able to follow instructions when applying their reading skills in practical subjects such as home economics. Most young people read a wide range of age-appropriate texts well. A minority use digital technology well to support their understanding of texts.

- A few young people in the senior phase show a good understanding of more complex language and can discuss and compare songs and poems. They talk enthusiastically and knowledgeably about the impact of pollution on the environment while gaining valuable qualifications in learning for sustainability. While there are a few good examples of writing displayed in the corridors and in classes, staff need to develop further young people's writing skills across a broader range of genres.

Numeracy and mathematics
Primary

- Overall, children in the primary stages are making good progress in numeracy and mathematics. Almost all children are achieving numeracy targets set within individual education plans.

- In the lower primary, almost all children can sort fruits and vegetables by colour. They are supported well to use the data collected to form simple bar graphs. In the middle primary, most children can find missing numbers on a number line up to 20. They can recall number sequences forwards and backwards between 0 and 30. They are beginning to read and display o'clock times on a clock face. Most children in the upper primary can solve simple missing number problems. They can identify, describe and create symmetrical pictures with one line of symmetry and interpret simple graphs, charts and signs.

Secondary

- Within the broad general education, the school is developing its approaches to mental agility. As a result, most young people are developing a sound knowledge of key number facts. This is also supporting staff to identify and address gaps in learning.

- Most young people in the broad general education are able to calculate addition within 100, and can identify and use all coins and notes to £20. Within the senior phase, young people can compare costs to identify best value for money. They can convert between currencies using real life exchange rates.

Attainment over time

- All children and young people have individual targets set in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Data gathered over the past three years shows that almost all children and young people achieved most of their individual learning targets in literacy and numeracy. Most are making good progress across the curriculum, taking account of their individual needs. For a few children and young people, staff should consider more challenging targets, particularly at the primary stages.

- Senior phase attainment has improved over the past three years. Most young people achieve National Qualifications units and course awards in a wide range of subjects including English, mathematics and information and communications technology. The school significantly

increased the number of young people achieving a National Qualifications course award at National 4 in session 2018 -2019.

- The school is developing a range of data to evidence progress. Senior leaders are well aware of the need to organise data better to provide clear and meaningful information about learners' progress. This will ensure that children and young people experiencing difficulties can be identified quickly and provided with appropriate additional support.

Overall quality of learners' achievements
- Children and young people benefit from a range of opportunities to develop the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence. Involvement in the pupil council, Eco group and buddying programme builds children's and young people's confidence and empowers them to contribute to school improvement. Increased opportunities for achievement should be provided to children across the primary department.

- A significant number of young people have acquired a range of awards for their achievements. These include the Saltire Award, Duke of Edinburgh's Award, John Muir Discovery Awards and Steps to Work and Personal Achievement Awards. Use of the Junior Awards Scotland Scheme has recently been extended beyond upper primary to include S1 and S2.

- Aided by a well-organised senior phase programme and effective links with a range of local and national partners and businesses, all young people are ably developing skills for life and work. They are improving their skills in problem solving, customer care, communication, health and safety and literacy and numeracy.

Equity for all learners
- The school has a sound understanding of the socio-economic background of all children and young people. It has put in place a range of effective interventions to raise attainment in literacy and numeracy, improve attendance and encourage parental participation. These interventions include specialist training for staff, targeted programmes of support in reading and family learning initiatives. Data provided by the school shows an increase in National Qualifications course awards achieved by young people facing additional barriers to learning over the last three years.

- The school is taking steps to improve learner's attendance through reducing unauthorised absence and targeting children and young people most at risk. The school has reduced exclusions this year by effectively supporting children and young people experiencing social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The effective use of the school's Calm Base has been instrumental to this success.

- All young people who left Mary Russell School in the previous two years were successful in moving on to a positive and sustained destination. Destinations included further education and employment.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion - wellbeing

■ Approaches to ensuring wellbeing are improving outcomes for children and young people. Underpinned by the school's vision and values, the school community has a shared understanding of wellbeing and children's rights. Children's and young people's unique needs are considered, understood and respected. Positive relationships enable almost all children and young people to feel safe and included. They are able to discuss personal and sensitive aspects of their life because they feel cared about. Almost all children and young people believe that their views are taken into account.

■ Wellbeing indicators are an integral feature of school life. Staff support children and young people to demonstrate their understanding of wellbeing indicators regularly. This enables children and young people to discuss aspects of their wellbeing more effectively. As a result of effective professional learning, all staff have a strong understanding of nurture principles. A nurturing approach is evident in the quality of relationships demonstrated across the school. This is increasing the skills and confidence of staff to respond to, and address, any areas of concern raised by children and young people. Most parents feel that the school supports their child's emotional wellbeing. As planned, staff should continue to implement emotional literacy across the school.

■ The flexible learning environment provided by the Calm Base supports young people well to engage in learning in a way which best suits their individual needs. In addition to providing targeted learning programmes, the Calm Base provides young people with choice about where they learn best. The recent introduction of a secondary nurture class has extended further the range of learning environments. Early indications are that this is successfully supporting young people to increase their engagement in learning. The Calm Base and nurture class support effectively the de-escalation of potentially challenging situations and enables young people to re-engage with learning quickly. This has contributed to a significant reduction in the number of exclusions over the past three years. More work remains to be done to reduce the number of exclusions further.

■ Staff forge strong relationships with children and their families. Aided by Pupil Equity Funding, a 'Parents in Partnership' programme is successfully engaging parents in activities where they can learn with their child. Weekly sessions for S1 parents and young people are focussing on wellbeing to support transition.

■ Tailored transition programmes meet the specific needs of individual children and young people well. When required, an extended series of initial visits builds relationships and increases familiarity with the school setting. Partners support transitions well, particularly when children transfer from a mainstream primary. Almost all children and young people who recently moved school felt well supported.

■ Approaches to learning about food and health across the school are very effective. These support children and young people to make healthy food choices. Food preparation activities help prepare children and young people for independent living. They apply their food preparation and hospitality skills in the Step Unit Café within the school.

■ Children and young people are clear about why they need to be physically active. Staff respond effectively to children's and young people's particular interests, such as Parkour and dance. This motivates children and young people to participate in physical activities. Their self-esteem and confidence is increasing as a result.

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.