

Lybster Primary School Nursery Day Care of Children

Lybster Primary School
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Type of inspection:
Announced

Completed on:
27 March 2025

Service provided by:
Highland Council

Service provider number:
SP2003001693

Service no:
CS2003017239

About the service

Lybster Primary School Nursery is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 23 children, from the age of two years to those not yet attending primary school. The nursery is operated by The Highland Council. The head teacher is the registered manager of the nursery but is responsible for more than one school. The nursery operates term time only.

The service operates from a playroom within Lybster Primary School. There is also an enclosed outdoor play area which contains a range of loose parts and open-ended resources which extend and enrich the children's imaginative play and learning experiences.

About the inspection

This was an announced inspection which took place on 25 and 26 March 2025. The inspection was carried out by one inspector from the Care Inspectorate.

To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included, previous inspection findings, registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with children using the service
- reviewed online questionnaires from four parents
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

During our inspection of the service, Education Scotland were also on site carrying out an inspection of the nursery and primary school. Their inspection findings will be published in a separate report on the Education Scotland website in due course.

Key messages

- Staff were warm and friendly in their approach which promoted a happy and inclusive environment.
- Parents were complimentary of the staff team.
- Not all children received the relevant support at the right time.
- Personal planning for individual children was inconsistent.
- Children benefitted from unhurried snack and mealtimes.
- Play and learning experiences provided children with opportunities to develop their literacy, language and numeracy skills.
- Quality assurance processes were in the early stages of development and needed to be more firmly embedded.
- Staff deployment did not consistently meet children's needs.

From this inspection we evaluated this service as:

In evaluating quality, we use a six point scale where 1 is unsatisfactory and 6 is excellent

How good is our care, play and learning?	3 - Adequate
How good is our setting?	4 - Good
How good is our leadership?	3 - Adequate
How good is our staff team?	3 - Adequate

Further details on the particular areas inspected are provided at the end of this report.

How good is our care, play and learning?

3 - Adequate

We evaluated this key question as adequate. While the strengths had a positive impact, key areas need to improve.

Quality Indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support

Most children were happy, settled and enjoyed their time at nursery. Overall, they experienced warm, caring and nurturing approaches to their personal care and learning needs. Staff recognised children as individuals and they responded to their needs and wishes, most of the time. They communicated with children at their level in a quiet and sensitive way. These supportive interactions developed close bonds between staff and children, contributing to positive relationships. However, at certain times across the day, staff in the nursery were task driven which meant children did not always receive the right support at the right time. The positive relationships developed with children were highlighted as a key strength by parents who told us:

"I feel my child is always welcomed into a warm and friendly environment. (Child) has settled very quickly thanks to the staff getting to know (Child) so well and ensuring (Child) has a positive experience."

"The staff have built up a lot of trust with the kids."

Staff spoke knowledgeably and confidently about children's individual care needs and what they did to support them. We saw some examples of staff using their knowledge to support individual children. However, there were occasions when staff did not use their knowledge effectively or did not use appropriate strategies to support individuals. This led to inconsistency in the support some children received and had potential to compromise their safety. Personal plans did not consistently identify clear strategies of support for all children, this meant staff did not always have access to detailed information to support continuity and consistency in care. **(See Area for improvement 1)**

Children benefitted from unhurried snack and mealtimes. During these experiences they were provided with opportunities to develop independence skills. For example, children poured their own milk, prepared and served their own snack and cleared away their dishes. The snack environment promoted a sociable experience. The addition of a tablecloth, flowers and real crockery supported a homely and relaxed atmosphere. Staff were not always responsive to children's needs at mealtimes as they were at times, task focused. This meant they did not always remain seated at the table with children. This resulted in inconsistent support and supervision for children eating.

Establishing good working relationship with parents was important to the staff team. There was daily communication with families at drop off and collection time as well as online updates. Most parents felt communication was good. However, a few parents commented that they would like more information about their child's day and more regular updates. For example, handovers at the end of the day were done in the cloak room area which meant they were very brief and generic, limiting the information being shared.

Quality Indicator 1.3: Play and learning

Children were meaningfully and actively involved in leading their own play and learning through a balance of spontaneous and planned experiences, which were fun and interesting and offered opportunities for children to investigate and be creative. When they were able to, staff followed children's lead within play and were responsive to their interests. For example, while playing with playdough staff encouraged children to identify and explore different shapes.

Further play and learning experiences provided children with opportunities to develop their literacy, language and numeracy skills. Staff shared stories with children at times throughout the day. There were opportunities for purposeful mark making across play areas indoors and outdoors as well as resources to support the development of children's pre-writing skills through activities such as, arts and crafts and painting. Counting was reinforced with children throughout day-to-day routines such as, snack and lunch time.

There were times when children experienced good quality interactions from staff where they used effective questioning to extend children's thinking and build on their interests. However, due to competing demands on their time, there were also missed opportunities to scaffold children's learning. This did not always support children to have high quality play and learning experiences.

Planning approaches within the service were child centred and responsive to the children's interests and life experiences. Staff used floor books to plan and record children's learning. Children's comments, ideas and learning were evidenced within these, which demonstrated their voice was included within the planning process.

Observations of children's learning were shared with families through an online platform. Some families commented on the positive progress their child had made whilst attending the service: One parent commented, "My child has become so confident and made so many new friends since going to nursery." Another parent commented, "We get frequent updates from staff on opportunities available to the children that allow them to progress on to reaching new milestones. As a family we love to share this journey with our child and staff to celebrate their achievements."

As part of their ongoing improvement work the service had identified the need to support and develop staff confidence in observation, planning and assessment approaches to ensure all children are supported and challenged at an appropriate level. This was in the early stages of development and the service should continue to develop this area of practice.

Areas for improvement

1. To support positive outcomes for children, the provider should ensure that personal planning enables each child to receive appropriate care and support to meet their needs; and
 - a) Ensure personal plans set out children's current needs and how they will be met.
 - b) Ensure all staff are aware of and understand the information within the personal plans and use this to effectively meet each child's needs.

c) Ensure staff are competent in completing chronologies and use these to take appropriate action to support children and their families.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'My personal plan (sometimes referred to as a care plan) is right for me because it sets out how my needs will be met, as well as my wishes and choices' (HSCS 1.15).

How good is our setting?

4 - Good

We evaluated this key question as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality Indicator 2.2: Children experience high quality facilities

The indoor playroom was clean and comfortable with plenty of natural light and ventilation. This provided a welcoming space for children. As part of their ongoing improvement work, the staff team had used best practice guidance to carefully consider the experiences and spaces available within the learning environment. Homely touches and carefully considered furnishings were being introduced to the indoor environment, contributing to a more homely and comfortable environment. The service should continue to develop homely touches to create an environment that captures the feeling of warmth and cosiness.

Displays around the rooms were used to reflect children's interests and experiences. This provided opportunities for children to revisit their play and learning and share their achievements, which contributed to children's sense of pride.

The layout of playrooms enabled children to access resources independently for exploration and play. Consideration had been given to the variety of activities and experiences on offer to stimulate children's sensory exploration. They enjoyed scooping, pouring and splashing in the water tray. This encouraged hand eye coordination and promoted social interaction and communication. Some open ended, natural child-centred resources indoors, enabled children to explore their creativity, imagination and problem-solving skills. However, there was scope to develop the use of open-ended resources further.

The building had direct access to an outdoor play area. Children used the outdoor space with confidence and experienced enjoyment, challenge and fun. Areas to climb, run and balance outdoors provided opportunities for children to develop their gross motor skills. There were some opportunities for free flow access between the indoor and outdoor play area. However, this was not consistently offered to children throughout the inspection. At times outdoor play was restricted. This should be reviewed and actioned to ensure children have choice around their play and learning experiences.

How good is our leadership?

3 - Adequate

We evaluated this key question as adequate. While the strengths had a positive impact, key areas need to improve.

Quality Indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well

Parents and children's views were valued in the service, parents strongly agreed or agreed that they were involved in a meaningful way to develop the service. A shared vision, values and aims had recently been developed in consultation with staff and families. These were aspirational and captured the uniqueness of the setting. Staff were in the process of embedding these values into the life of the setting, supporting children with their understanding of them.

A collaborative approach towards quality assurance and improvement was a priority for the manager. Staff were beginning to take on leadership roles and responsibilities to address identified improvements. This promoted an ethos where everyone felt confident to share ideas and initiate well informed change. However, robust systems were not in place to ensure a strategic overview. This meant developments were not consistently impacting on children's outcomes.

Self-evaluation processes were evolving; however, they were not yet regular or robust enough to secure sustained improvements. Processes had allowed staff to reflect on their practice and identify areas for improvement. However, actions were not yet being routinely evaluated or reviewed to assess the impact on children's experiences. We asked the manager to review and increase opportunities for staff to come together to reflect on practice and improvement priorities. **(See Area for improvement 1)**

Quality assurance systems and processes were not having a consistently positive impact. Some processes to review children's experiences and outcomes were in place. However, effective monitoring of staff practice was not yet established to support continuous improvement. For example, staff deployment had been reviewed. However, improvements in relation to this had not been sustained. This had potential to compromise children's safety. **(See Area for improvement 1)**

Support and supervision systems were in place. These provided opportunities for staff to meet with management to discuss their personal targets. However, they were not yet consistently enabling staff to reflect on practice and make improvements. We discussed with the manager and provider, ways in which the service could strengthen their processes. For example, linking support and feedback to formalised observation of staff practice.

Areas for improvement

1. To support positive and improved outcomes for children and families, the provider should ensure effective quality assurance systems are fully embedded into practice.

This should include but not be limited to:

- a) regular opportunities for reflection and self-evaluation of practice
- b) regular monitoring of staff practice to identify good quality skills and practice as well as training needs
- c) regular monitoring of the quality of children's experiences
- d) identifying measurable impacts that will benefit children's experiences and outcomes.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes' (HSCS 4.19).

How good is our staff team?

3 - Adequate

We evaluated this key question as adequate. While the strengths had a positive impact, key areas need to improve.

Quality Indicator 4.3: Staff deployment

All staff were caring and nurturing and committed to providing a positive experience for all children. They were warm and friendly in their approach which promoted a happy and inclusive environment where children could play and have fun. All parents spoke positively about the staff team. Comments included:

"Staff are very approachable, warm and friendly and I always feel I can express any concerns or have discussions with them."

"The nursery staff are very good at there jobs! My child really likes them and they are always lovely and helpful."

Staff and parents told us that staff absence had placed additional pressure on the staff team and had impacted on continuity in care. However, where possible the leadership team attempted to use the same supply staff to minimise disruption to children's routines.

The ethos between team members was positive and interactions between staff were kind and respectful. This helped create a positive atmosphere for both staff and children to feel comfortable and secure in. At times, the staff team communicated well with each other when a task took them away from their designated area. For example, they would inform each other when leaving the room or when attending to a child's needs. This was inconsistent throughout the day and at times children were not effectively supported.

Staff deployment did not consistently meet children's needs. On occasions staff were task orientated and not always aware of their positioning in relation to supporting interactions, experiences and outcomes. This was particularly noticeable at meal times, during busier times of the day and throughout daily transitions. As a result, staff did not always notice cues from children for support or interaction. This had the potential to compromise children's safety and impacted on play experiences. **(See Area for improvement 1)**

Staff told us effective arrangements were not in place to ensure they received breaks, which meant they did not have the opportunity to rest and feel refreshed. This had potential to compromise the quality of interactions.

Areas for improvement

1. To ensure children are safe and receive high quality experiences at all times the provider and manager should as a minimum, review and make appropriate changes to staff deployment, to improve experiences for children.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I have confidence in people because they are trained, competent and skilled, are able to reflect on their practice and follow their professional and organisational codes' (HSCS 3.14).

What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection

Areas for improvement

Previous area for improvement 1

More effective use could be made of the nursery garden and outside space to extend learning opportunities for the children.

National Care Standards Early Education and Childcare Up to the Age of 16 - Standard 5: Quality of Experience.

This area for improvement was made on 18 May 2018.

Action taken since then

The service now made effective use of the nursery garden and outside space to extend learning opportunities for children.

This recommendation has been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

Staff should continue to build on best practice guidance such as 'Building the Ambition' and 'My World Outdoors', available on the 'Early Learning and Childcare in Highland' website.

National Care Standards Early Education and Childcare Up to the Age of 16 - Standard 13: Improving the Service.

This area for improvement was made on 18 May 2018.

Action taken since then

Staff used best practice guidance to support them in making improvements to children's care, play and learning.

This recommendation has been met.

Previous area for improvement 3

The head teacher and staff should develop and implement robust procedures for evaluating the work of the nursery. Children, parents and stakeholder should have regular and focused opportunities to contribute to this evaluation.

National Care Standards Early Education and Childcare Up to the Age of 16 - Standard 13: Improving the Service.

This area for improvement was made on 18 May 2018.

Action taken since then

This recommendation has been replaced with a new area for improvement in relation to effective quality assurance processes.

Previous area for improvement 4

In line with 'Getting it Right for Every Child' guidance, detailed chronologies should be kept to highlight significant events which could affect children's wellbeing.

National Care Standards Early Education and Childcare Up to the Age of 16 - Standard 3: Health and Wellbeing.

This area for improvement was made on 31 March 2017.

Action taken since then

This recommendation has been replaced with a new area for improvement around effective personal planning and chronologies.

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.com.

Detailed evaluations

How good is our care, play and learning?	3 - Adequate
1.1 Nurturing care and support	3 - Adequate
1.3 Play and learning	4 - Good

How good is our setting?	4 - Good
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	4 - Good

How good is our leadership?	3 - Adequate
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	3 - Adequate

How good is our staff team?	3 - Adequate
4.3 Staff deployment	3 - Adequate

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