

Sgoil Araich Bhaile a Mhanaich Day Care of Children

Sgoil Bhaile a Mhanaich
Balivanich
Isle of Benbecula
HS7 5LS

Telephone: 01870 604 886

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
22 May 2025

Service provided by:
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

Service provider number:
SP2003002104

Service no:
CS2008184824

About the service

The service is provided by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and is registered to provide early learning and childcare education to a maximum of 56 children aged from birth to those not yet attending primary school.

The day care of children service is provided in the purpose-built nursery area of the Bhaile a Mhanaich school on the island of Benbecula. The Sgoil Àraich provides both Gaelic immersion and English education.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 21 and 22 May 2025. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate. During our inspection there were 35 children present on both days. 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:

- received electronic feedback from four families who used the service
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

As part of this inspection we undertook a focus area. We have gathered specific information to help us understand more about how services support children's safety, wellbeing and engagement in their play and learning. This included reviewing the following aspects:

- staff deployment
- safety of the physical environment, indoors and outdoors
- the quality of personal plans and how well children's needs are being met
- children's engagement with the experiences provided in their setting.

Key messages

- The setting promoted strong partnership working with parents, who felt involved and included in their child's care and the life of the setting.
- Interactions between staff and children were nurturing, warm and caring.
- Children's safety was promoted as they accessed a safe and well-maintained environment and resources.
- Children benefitted from a manager and staff team who were committed to the future development and continuous improvement of the service.
- Staff worked well together as a team to offer positive outcomes for children.

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?	5 - Very Good
How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good

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

How good is our care, play and learning?

5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

Quality indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support

Children were cared for by a friendly and kind staff team, who knew them and their families very well. Staff worked in partnership with families to ensure that children were supported to achieve and to have fun. Children were happy and confident and clearly trusted the staff which helped them to feel safe and secure in the setting. Parents who provided feedback confirmed this by telling us "My children are well cared for, the staff know them well as individuals, and they look forward to it every day; they are very happy there" and "I have always felt supported by all of the staff, when we have had any family issues, or if I have any questions or concerns about my children; they are always happy to talk and help in any way they can."

Building relationships and friendships was important to the manager and staff team. We observed respectful relationships between children and staff, and children with other children. Children were caring towards each other. We observed older siblings in the school taking time to talk to children and offer cuddles to their siblings when they saw them. Seeing and engaging with siblings during the day contributed to children feeling safe and secure.

Each child had a personal plan which had been developed in collaboration with their parents. Personal plans clearly showed children's individual needs as well as their likes and dislikes. Staff used these personal plans to record and update changes to children's routines and needs. We could see how staff used personal plans to support children's health and wellbeing. As a result, children received the care and attention they required to progress and achieve.

Staff understood that some children may require additional support. To support children, they had made positive links with other professionals to seek advice and ensure that children received the right care at the right time. Where children had transferred from other settings, they ensured that information was sought about children to support their transition to the service. Timely interventions and support were put in place to ensure children and families were supported. This led to positive outcomes for children and families.

Staff were aware of children's medical conditions, including food allergies and intolerances. Where children required medication this was stored and administered safely. Emergency medication was on hand for staff, and all records completed accurately. To support children's health and wellbeing staff had received EPI pen training.

Children's safety, emotional security and wellbeing was supported through sensitive arrangements for sleep and rest. Staff had good knowledge of safe sleep practice and how to keep children safe. Sleep room temperatures were monitored well, and safe sleep checks were carried out by staff. Children slept in line with their personal routines. This highlighted staff's responsive approach to meeting children's individual needs.

The service provided a warm lunch to children. We observed children over the lunchtime period. Younger children experienced a lunchtime that was a social and positive experience. Staff sat with children and supervised them as they ate; they chatted with them and offered support with feeding where needed. Older children had begun going to the school hall for lunch as part of their transition programme. Whilst we acknowledged that this was to support transitions, we found that it was a less nurturing lunchtime experience. We noted that the lunch hall was a noisy and busy environment for children. Children were given little opportunity to be independent as meals were plated up for them. In addition to this staff become very task orientated serving and tidying up lunches for children. As a result, children did not benefit from staff engaging with them as much as they could have. The manager should review how lunch in the school hall could be improved to provide a more relaxed experience where children are well supervised and their independence developed.

Quality indicator 1.3: Play and learning

Children were having fun and engaged in a variety of experiences. They had good opportunities to lead their own play and learning, which impacted positively on their development and wellbeing. Staff joined in with play and were responsive to children's interests. They were skilful in knowing when to step back from play and join in again to spark children's interest and curiosity. This meant staff could respond meaningfully to children's needs and wishes and supported children's overall wellbeing and sense of belonging.

Staff had arranged a wide range of resources attractively to invite children to learn and be curious. Resources supported children's problem-solving skills, creativity, language, numeracy, and imagination skills. For example, a turf tray was set up with sand play and mark making tools along with letters to offer opportunities to mark make that support their writing skills and language development. Additionally loose parts were displayed in different ways across the playrooms to support inquiry, curiosity and interest.

Throughout our inspection children particularly enjoyed playing and learning outdoors. They had lots of opportunities to run around and develop physically outdoors. We observed them safely negotiating large pieces of physical apparatus, where they were learning to climb, balance and slide safely. In addition to this children enjoyed and were curious about their natural environment. We observed staff and children discussing the life cycle of butterflies. To support children's understanding staff asked open ended questions and provided books about this. This highlighted how staff used children's interests to support their learning.

Planning approaches to play and learning were child centred. Floor books were used to capture group learning. They included input from children, observations, photographs, links to curriculums, children's rights, schematic development and children's voices. This supported staff to gather children's progress within their play ideas and allowed opportunity for children to revisit and consolidate their learning.

Staff used an online App "See-saw" to document and share individual children's learning. Professional learning to support play and learning approaches had taken place to support staff skills and knowledge in evidence-based approaches and quality observations. We sampled observations and found some of the most recent ones included analysis of children's learning. We discussed with management how the addition of next steps and possible lines of development within individual learning journals would support staff to evidence progress over time.

In both the Gàidhlig medium and Gàidhlig learners rooms staff were committed to making every effort to create and promote opportunities for children to hear, speak and understand Gàidhlig. Staff were actively encouraged and supported by the head of school and local authority to provide Gàidhlig and promote the Gaelic First Policy. We observed children listening, responding and speaking Gàidhlig at different times during our visit. This supported children's development.

How good is our setting?

5 - Very Good

We evaluated this key question as very 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.

Children benefitted from an environment that was clean, bright, well ventilated and well maintained. To support this two janitors and cleaners were employed. The building was cleaned and maintained by an external company. The manager told us that any maintenance or repair issues were dealt with promptly. This ensured that children benefitted from an environment that was safe and well maintained.

Children were being cared for in a welcoming, spacious and safe environment which provided them with a wide variety of play and learning opportunities. The layout of furnishings, toys and materials enabled children to make choices that supported their play ideas.

Infection control procedures were in place, and appropriate handwashing facilities were available in the playrooms. We observed staff and children were carrying out effective hand washing at key points, for example, after being outdoors, before meals and after personal care. This contributed to children's health and wellbeing.

Each playroom provided direct access to the outdoor play spaces. We noted how staff were much more confident and had developed more of a free flow experience for children. This meant that children could choose where they wanted to play safely and happily.

Staff were vigilant in ensuring that children were accounted for at all times. We were concerned about how staff accounted for children during our last inspection. We were satisfied that robust procedures and practices are being carried out this supported children's safety.

Since our last inspection audits of the environment and resources had been carried out. As a result some playrooms had been painted in more neutral colours which helped to create a more calming and homely environment. Other playrooms were scheduled to be painted in the holidays. Additionally the introduction of soft lighting, foliage and plants help to create a calm nurturing environment. Parents who provided feedback spoke positively about the environment. They told us "The changes to the rooms have meant there are more comfy spaces for my child to relax or take some quiet time if they need it. There is a lovely sleep room which my baby uses to have their daily naps" and "The nursery rooms are always so beautiful and clean".

Wall displays showcased children's creativity and achievements. Children were proud to see their photographs and artwork on display in playrooms and the hallway. Displaying children's work helped to keep parents informed of what children were doing and provided an opportunity to celebrate success.

Children enjoyed playing outdoors in the fresh air. Improvements had been made to resources and the types of experiences children engaged in outdoors. The outdoor environment was safe and secure. A new perimeter fence and gates had been installed since our last inspection which supported the safety of children.

How good is our leadership?

5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

Quality indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well

The service was being led by a motivated and committed management team consisting of the manager and playleaders. They demonstrated commitment to the development of the service and had worked hard to involve staff, children and families in supporting improvement. Reflective monitoring and critical analysis of what improvements were needed had taken place and had been shared with staff and families. The creative use of display to demonstrate planned improvements helped to involve children and families in the setting.

Although the Sgoil Àraich had always been included in the Sgoil improvement plan the decision to develop and focus on their own improvement plan in response to previous inspection findings meant that the plan was more focus, relevant and achievable. As a result, staff were very positive and engaged in the settings improvement plan and journey. This meant that experiences and outcomes for children and families had improved.

Effective monitoring of playrooms and staff practice supported improvements in the environment and staff practice. Peer monitoring across different Sgoil Àraich within the cluster enabled sharing of practice between managers, playleaders and keyworkers. In addition to this the introduction of network meetings initially for playleaders and now also keyworkers meant that learning was shared across the authority.

The setting valued parents as partners in the development and day to day life of the setting. Parents who provided feedback strongly agreed or agreed that they and their child were involved in a meaningful way to help develop the service. Some of their comments included:

"Through questionnaires and forms that are sent out we are able to voice our ideas and opinions on anything in the nursery."

"Parents and children where asked how we would like the nursery to be set up, which is very homely and the children just love it."

"We are often invited in for stay and play sessions, I can see how my child is spending their time through Seesaw and Facebook updates and if we have any ideas or suggestions we can speak to staff or add them to the "2 stars and a wish" slips that are sent home."

Children's rights, including their right to play and be listened to were promoted throughout the service. Staff took time to listen, respond, and facilitate children's learning ideas. Children's voices were strong. This was clearly evidenced through big books where children's learning and planning for future learning was recorded.

How good is our staff team?

5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children/people, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

Quality indicator 4.3: Staff deployment

Throughout our inspection we found there were always sufficient staffing arrangements to meet minimum ratios and meet the individual needs of children attending the service. The manager told us how they took steps to ensure that the service was appropriately staffed and recognised this as being essential to the health and safety of the children using the service.

Planning staff deployment to support children and meet their individual needs was important to the service. Staff shifts and breaks were planned effectively to ensure that children receive as consistent care as possible. In addition to this staff shifts were planned in such a way that key staff were available at the beginning and end of each day. This meant that parents had the opportunity to speak to their child's keyworker informally at drop off and collection times. This contributed to positive relationships between staff and families.

Children were being cared for by a caring, committed and professional staff team. Across the team there was a wide mix of skills and experiences, which helped them to work together to meet children's needs effectively. Interactions between staff, children and parents were respectful, friendly and kind. Parents who provided feedback commented positively about the staff team. They told us "I have had children go through both English and Gaelic room in the nursery so have dealt with almost all of the staff at one time. They are genuinely lovely and caring, I feel confident that my children are safe, happy and cared for; and are learning, exploring and expressing themselves every day" and "No matter the nursery teacher they know each child by name even when not in the room with them and I think that's great".

The manager knew their team well and supported them to develop their skills and interests. Support and supervision sessions were used as a way of checking in on staff wellbeing as they were needed. Annual reviews meant that they had the opportunity to reflect on their practice and identify areas they would like to focus on. Staff felt well supported by their manager. The ethos of support and respect from the manager contributed the positive morale amongst the staff team. This contributed to an emotionally secure environment for children and families.

What the service has done to meet any requirements we made at or since the last inspection

Requirements

Requirement 1

By 31 July 2024, the provider must ensure that children are cared for in a safe and hygienic environment where sufficient measures are in place to protect children in line with current best practice guidance.

To do this, the provider must, as a minimum ensure:

- a) staff should continue to maintain a safe and comfortable environment where children are supervised;
- b) nappy changing policies and procedures should be consistent with best practice, Children under two years must have a self-contained designated nappy changing room; and
- c) staff must ensure that registers and signing in and out sheets accurately reflect children's attendance.

This requirement was made on 18 April 2024.

Action taken on previous requirement

Children were being safely supervised in an environment that was safe and hygienic.

Service were adhering to nappy changing guidance. We advised that due to changing guidance they are no longer required to have designated nappy changing area for children under two.

Staff ensured that accurate records of children attending the service were maintained safely.

Met - outwith timescales

Requirement 2

By 31 July 2024, the provider must ensure that children experience a high-quality service that is well led and managed.

To do this, the provider must, at a minimum, ensure the manager is clear about her role and responsibility in relation to notifications that must be made to regulatory bodies and submit the required notifications within the timescales required.

This requirement was made on 18 April 2024.

Action taken on previous requirement

The manager was clear about when and to whom notifications should be made. Since our last inspection the manager had submitted notifications to the Care Inspectorate when necessary.

Met - outwith timescales

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

To support service improvement, the manager and staff should continue to develop concise and effective quality assurance systems to ensure that the quality of the service is monitored and assessed effectively.

This should include, but is not limited to:

- a) monitor staff practice and provide staff with constructive feedback to support them in meeting children's needs;
- b) carry out regular and effective monitoring and auditing of chronologies and personal plans to ensure detailed and relevant information is gathered to support children's needs; and
- (c) further development of the self-evaluation framework to support the service identify strengths and areas for improvement.

This area for improvement was made on 18 April 2024.

Action taken since then

A robust system for self evaluation and monitoring had been developed. Regular and effective auditing and monitoring of chronologies and personal plans ensured that detailed and relevant information was gathered to support children's needs.

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?	5 - Very Good
1.1 Nurturing care and support	5 - Very Good
1.3 Play and learning	5 - Very Good
How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	5 - Very Good
How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	5 - Very Good
How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good
4.3 Staff deployment	5 - Very Good

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