

Summarised inspection findings

Balmalloch Nursery Class

North Lanarkshire Council

24 June 2025

Key contextual information

Balmalloch Nursery Class is in a purpose-built building adjacent to Balmalloch Primary School. The setting has recently become registered as an indoor/outdoor nursery and increased their registration to 52 children. The setting is open from 8am until 6pm Monday to Friday over 48 weeks. Currently there are 51 children attending on a full-time morning, afternoon or term time basis. Children attend from age three to starting primary school. The environment provides a large indoor space. Children have free-flow access to a garden backing on to a wooded area used for Forest Kindergarten sessions. They have access to the primary school and use resources such as the gym hall to extend children's experiences.

The headteacher has overall responsibility for the nursery and is the named manager. Two early learning and childcare principal leads have responsibility for day-to-day management of the nursery. The wider team includes one early learning and childcare lead practitioner, four early learning and childcare keyworkers and three early learning and childcare support workers. Over the past six months, there has been significant staffing changes.

1.3 Leadership of change

good

This indicator focuses on working together at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which reflects the context of the setting within its community. Planning for continuous improvement change should be evidence-based and clearly linked to strong self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure that the pace of change is well judged and appropriate to have a positive impact on outcomes for children. The themes are:

- developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the setting and its community
 - strategic planning for continuous improvement
 - implementing improvement and change
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- The nursery team have developed a shared vision and values in consultation with children and families. Practitioners and children have a clear shared understanding of the values and demonstrate these throughout the session. For example, children demonstrate kindness and good manners during the lunchtime routine. Practitioners are at the early stages of making children's rights more visible for children. As identified by senior leaders, practitioners should continue to share children's rights in meaningful and relevant ways with all children, in order for these to become embedded.
 - The nursery leadership team are highly visible, leading a motivated team who work positively together, share expertise and support each other to develop their professional understanding. The early learning and childcare principal leads have focused on developing a shared understanding of the fundamental importance of wellbeing, resulting in a welcoming, supportive ethos across the nursery community.
 - The nursery leadership team have created a culture of reflection and collegiate professional learning, including access to high quality training opportunities for practitioners. The staff team value opportunities for professional development. They use what they have learned to improve practice and, notably, to support children's emotional wellbeing well. The team have joined training opportunities in the primary school and senior leaders should now consider strengthening joint work across early level. This will enable practitioners to share and disseminate their good practice in relation to children learning through play.

- The leadership team know the children, families and staff in the nursery well. They have introduced online learning journals which support practitioners to link children's experiences beyond the nursery with the curriculum effectively. They work with practitioners to gather data from observations, learning journals and floor books. This is improving how accurately staff determine children's progress and helps them to identify appropriate next steps. The nursery improvement plan reflects the significant changes within the staff team. There is a positive and highly motivated new team in place. Leaders should now consider the pace of change, shifting the focus from developing staff capacity to improving learning and teaching. This should further improve outcomes for children. As part of their improvement journey, leaders have been keen to make good use of national practice guidance to support improvement. They should continue to reflect how the guidance can best support practitioners understanding of pedagogy.
- All practitioners contribute well to self-evaluation activities. They have begun to take on leadership roles identified through the professional development and review process to support identified areas for improvement, for example, outdoor learning. The team should continue to develop meaningful leadership opportunities for both practitioners and children in the wider life of the nursery.
- Nursery leaders have a well-organised approach to monitoring the quality of the work of the nursery. They make good use of a quality assurance calendar to plan and undertake this work. They involve the whole team in reflecting on practice and this is helping to identify what is working well. They now need to develop this approach to include challenge as well as support. This will help practitioners as they work to improve their practice in supporting children's learning.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

good

This indicator focuses on ensuring high quality learning experience for young children. It highlights the importance of a very good understanding of child development and early learning pedagogy. Effective use is made of observation to inform future learning and identify the progress made. Children are involved in planning for their own learning. Together these ensure children's successes and achievements are maximised. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of interactions
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- Practitioners are nurturing and warm in their interactions demonstrating a high level of care towards all children. They create a respectful and welcoming ethos, with positive relationships at the core. This results in children who are happy, settled and confident as they explore their nursery environment.
- Practitioners provide rich opportunities for children to experiment and be curious, both indoors and out. Children have time, space and freedom to explore and, as a result, almost all children engage well. They concentrate for lengthy periods, exploring and interacting with a wide range of resources which encourage imagination and independence.
- Children have many opportunities to enrich their learning and develop cross-curricular skills such as problem-solving and working together as they play in the well-resourced outdoor area. The team understand the importance of outdoor learning and work together effectively to share expertise. Children visit areas within the local community such as the care home, shop and playpark. This gives children many opportunities to build their understanding of their local community.
- Almost all practitioners interact effectively with children to support their engagement. They are skilled in using commentary, explanation and open-ended questioning to support children to become confident, capable learners and think more deeply as they play. Practitioners know children well and respond sensitively to their individual needs.
- Children use the internet to research and find information. Practitioners should continue to extend and embed the use of technology to enhance learning opportunities.
- Practitioners record children's experiences well through online journals, wall displays and in floor books. This information shows the wide variety of rich experiences in which children are involved. Practitioners should continue to develop approaches to gathering information about individual children's learning and link this to planned experiences. Senior leaders should continue to support practitioners to help them identify and record children's significant learning and skills. This will help them to avoid duplication and have a greater focus on children's learning.
- Practitioners are highly responsive to children and encourage them to make choices and follow their interests as part of daily practice. The team contribute well to monthly intentional planning processes which identify wider contexts for learning related to seasonal and cultural events. Senior leaders should consider how they can streamline these planning systems and use them more effectively to support children to develop skills and understanding.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning and developmental pathways

- The nursery team provide a wide range of exciting experiences for children to learn across all areas of the Curriculum for Excellence. The curriculum is firmly based on play and complements almost all children's developmental stages. Senior leaders support practitioners to ensure that the learning spaces are well-resourced, attractive and inspire children to explore and develop creativity.
- The team have a clearly articulated focus on the importance of outdoor experiences for learning. They understand the value of sustained, uninterrupted play and ensure that children have time and space to revisit learning. They use progression pathways to plan for coverage or and progression over time well. These opportunities support children to build on their existing skills and knowledge.
- Practitioners use the local environment well to enhance children's learning. They visit the local shops, farm and nearby woods. Children are developing skills in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing through real-life experiences. The team should continue to develop opportunities for children to apply these skills through daily routines and play experiences.
- The team understand the importance of transitions and have a well-established programme of experiences for children moving on to primary one. Children from the primary school regularly visit the nursery. Children and families joining the nursery are sensitively supported through the individualised settling in process.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on children and families – parental engagement

- Practitioners have established positive relationships with families and know them well. The team communicate effectively with families through consultations, newsletters and sways. They share information in a friendly manner informally as parents drop off and collect their children. The team encourage parents to join their children for 'wellbeing walks' and 'stay and play' sessions. This work is helping to build strong connections between families and the nursery and enables families to better understand the educational impact of these experiences.
- Parents can view a wide variety of children's experiences through online journals and social media. They engage well with these opportunities and share children's experiences from home. Practitioners should continue to invite families into the nursery and as planned, organise further opportunities to engage families in supporting their child's learning at home.

2.1 Safeguarding

- 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.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

good

This indicator reflects on the setting's approach to children's wellbeing which underpins their ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of each individual. A clear focus on wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all children to be the best they can be and celebrates their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- The wellbeing of the whole community is central to the work of the nursery. Practitioners support children well to understand their own emotions, promoting strategies and using wellbeing vocabulary to help them manage their feelings. This helps them to regulate their emotions and manage conflict. The team use a wide range of resources to support children to develop their emotional resilience. Practitioners provide positive role models for children and most children are developing friendships and play well together.
- All practitioners recognise the importance of promoting wellbeing as a fundamental principle of their practice. They focus on supporting each other's wellbeing as well as the wellbeing of their children and families. This helps create a positive team ethos and a nurturing learning environment for the children.
- Practitioners share the wellbeing indicators with children and a few children can talk knowledgeably about keeping safe and being responsible. Children know they are respected and listened to, and they are keen to share their views. Practitioners gather children's views, for example on the development of the outdoor area or on resources they would like in the learning environment. Practitioners should offer further opportunities for children to take responsibility and contribute to future improvements.
- All practitioners are clear about their statutory duties in relation to early learning and childcare and keeping children safe. Practitioners work with families to develop individual plans to support children's health, care and wellbeing needs. They update these plans in consultation with parents and, where appropriate, support agencies, ensuring that barriers to learning are reduced. Practitioners need to continue to develop personalised and appropriate strategies so that children make the best possible progress.
- Children benefit from healthy snacks and lunches and are independent in mealtime routines. Practitioners sit with the children, encouraging good table manners and respect for others. This results in a relaxed, sociable dining experience.
- Practitioners have created an inclusive ethos. They treat children with a high level of respect and ensure they receive the support they need to access early learning and childcare. Practitioners have developed positive and trusting relationships with families and have a good understanding of each child's circumstances. This strong partnership helps practitioners to respond well to children and their individual needs.
- Practitioners are beginning to develop learning experiences which help children understand diversity and the multi-cultural society in which we live. There are welcome signs in children's home languages and children are encouraged to try foods from around the world on 'World

Food Wednesday'. Practitioners have correctly identified valuing and representing diversity as an area to develop further.

3.2 Securing children's progress

good

This indicator relates to the development and learning of babies, toddlers and young children. It requires clear understanding of early learning and development and pedagogy. It reflects the integrated way young children learn and the importance of experiences and development happening on an individual basis within a supportive, nurturing and stimulating environment. High quality early learning and childcare contributes significantly to enhancing children's progress and achievement as they grow and learn. It can benefit all children by closing the attainment gap and ensuring equity for all. It is about the holistic nature of development and learning ensuring these foundations are secure in order to achieve future attainment success. The themes are:

- progress in communication, early language, mathematics, and health and wellbeing
- children's progress over time
- overall quality of children's achievement
- ensuring equity for all children

- Most children are making good progress in communication and early language. Children enjoy conversations with practitioners and express themselves confidently in a developmentally appropriate manner. Most children enjoy a wide range of mark making experiences both indoors and outside. They produce detailed drawings and are very proud of their achievements. They explore a wide range of books, listen attentively to stories with a practitioner and use puppets in the story area. Children enjoy sustained periods of role play both indoors and out. A few children are confidently writing their name and attempting other words. Children should now receive further opportunities to create and record their own stories and develop their understanding of their roles as authors and illustrators.
- Most children are making good progress in mathematics. They use blocks in the construction area to design and build increasingly complex structures, for example houses. They use appropriate mathematical language to describe size and identify shapes. A few children are counting natural objects throughout their play to 10 and beyond. Practitioners should now ensure that they focus on developing children's mathematical thinking and numeracy skills through their interactions. A few children would benefit from additional challenge to develop their mathematical understanding and skills.
- Almost all children are making very good progress in their health and wellbeing. They access a wide range of experiences to develop their gross motor skills. Children use well-resourced and carefully planned outdoor spaces, where they jump on blocks, use bikes, climb trees and run. Children have regular opportunities to visit the outdoor woodland area, where they confidently risk assess the space and independently organise themselves for play.
- Children are making good progress across most areas of the curriculum. However, there are children who are capable of making greater progress. Practitioners are at the early stages of tracking children's progress over time. They recognise the need to develop this further to demonstrate progress more effectively. The team understands that better information about children's knowledge and skills will support planning for future learning.
- Practitioners make visible children's wider achievements in the nursery. They encourage parents to share achievements from home in learning journals. Practitioners should continue to monitor responses to ensure there are regular contributions from all children.
- Practitioners know their families and the community the nursery serves well. They ensure all children have equal access to learning opportunities. They provide clothing to ensure all

children can access outdoors in all weathers. Practitioners sensitively support families by offering pre-loved children's clothes, food and books to promote reading. The team work with other agencies and signpost further support for families where appropriate.

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.