

Summarised inspection findings

Whithorn School Nursery Class

Dumfries and Galloway Council

24 January 2023

Key contextual information

Whithorn nursery is part of Whithorn Primary School. Whithorn is a rural area where the school and nursery are a main focal point. There is a strong sense of identity and community in the local area. There is a separate independent entrance for parents, and access to the school through the gym hall. There is one large playroom, with a smaller room presently used for storage. The playroom has direct access to a large, interesting outdoor area. The current roll of the nursery is 25, eight children attend on a full-time basis and 17 children are part-time. The team includes a manager, practitioners and support worker. The manager is responsible for the work of the nursery team.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the team supported children, parents and one another to adapt to the challenges they faced. They used online and telephone contact to maintain connections and provide support. Staff were involved in providing a local hub within the school. The team worked well to support one another to return to in-person learning. Practitioners' commitment and sense of teamwork provided continuity for children during periods of staff illness.

Repairs to the outdoor area had started during a recent school holiday. At the time of the inspection, repairs were not yet complete. This restricted children's access to specific areas and equipment.

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

- Whithorn nursery provides a caring and inclusive environment for children and their families. Staff work well together as a supportive team. The manager has successfully led the team to improve spaces, interactions and experiences. Practice is increasingly responsive, and child led. There is improved consistency in how the team respond to children. Practitioners are familiar with the vision and aims statement developed by the school. This statement does not yet fully reflect the approach of the nursery team. The manager recognises that a shorter, more accessible vision statement needs to be developed. Practitioners should engage children, parents, staff and partners in shaping relevant aims and an overall vision. This will help ensure the vision is meaningful to children, and that it celebrates and informs the work of the team.
- The manager is a professional, well organised, supportive leader. The nursery improvement plan (NIP) includes many relevant improvement priorities. The NIP includes necessary focused work to target and improve children's early literacy and communication skills. The team have worked together to improve the focus and quality of written observations of children's learning. As a result, staff's observations show early signs of improvement. The manager and team are reflective and thoughtful. They notice and celebrate children's achievements and improvements in children's development. The team have made important changes to the planning of learning. Practitioners should agree the aspects of the NIP that they will prioritise in

their self-evaluation. This will help them to focus on the areas that have the most impact on outcomes for children.

- The manager is implementing new approaches to plan and record more of the reflections of the team and the impact of improvements. Where practitioners take ownership of a targeted area of work, they are more confident in gathering and assessing evidence of improvements. A few practitioners are increasingly confident in identifying and leading improvement priorities. The manager and practitioners implement ideas from professional learning in improvement science to support and improve the work of the whole team. The team should continue to develop individual leadership roles for all staff. As the team take forward improvements, it will be important to agree specific and measurable targets at the beginning. The team would benefit from looking outwards to learn about approaches to self-evaluation in other settings. Sharing practice with other settings would help the team to secure and personalise their own approach. Practitioners should ensure that any new approaches, for example in planning assessment approaches, fully reflect their child centred pedagogy. Practitioners should increase children's and parents' involvement in leading and evaluating the impact of improvements.

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

- Children benefit from sensitive encouragement and well-judged support from practitioners. Most children are increasingly confident as they play in the mud kitchen or make playdough. Children very much enjoy the freedom and challenge of the outdoor spaces. Adults are attentive and attuned to children, as they engage with them in their play. Practitioners are positive role models for children. The team value and respect children, and one another. Children are patient as they help others new to the setting get ready to play outside. The team plan experiences that respond to questions children have about the world around them. Increased use of open-ended resources means children develop their own ideas as they play. The team now needs to develop further the balance between child initiated and adult initiated experiences.
- Practitioners know children's interests and their stage of development well. They use this information to support children to settle in and achieve their next steps. Staff use gesture, eye contact and pauses well to connect with and engage children in experiences. A few practitioners need to continue to develop their use of questioning techniques to explore children's thinking in more depth. The team's attention to, and respect for, children's ideas mean that children frequently share their ideas and experiences. Practitioners are developing their use of floor books and wall displays to document learning and progress. The team should continue to ensure methods and displays involve children in a meaningful way.
- Practitioners assess and track children's progress using new formats provided by the local authority. The majority of children are new to the setting. A significant number of children have targets related to language and communication. Commendably, the manager has worked with school staff to pilot new approaches to assessment. Proposed new assessments do not yet fully capture what children can already do, or link to the play-based approach of the team. The team are becoming more confident as they document the impact of targeted interventions for children. This includes work to increase stories, small group talking and listening programmes and work with parents on health and wellbeing skills. The team should ensure assessments and tracking overviews align with their pedagogy and reflect the progress of children across different areas of the curriculum. Practitioners should consider if national guidance 'Milestones for Learners with Complex Additional Support Needs' could be used to track progress for a few children.
- Practitioners articulate confidently to parents the progress children have made in their learning. A new online platform is used to record experiences in nursery and share learning at home. The manager has identified correctly that the tracking of children's progress across literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing is not yet sufficiently robust. New baseline assessments are used to capture children's starting points and inform planning of experiences and interactions. It is important that these assessments are evaluated and developed further to

ensure they celebrate what children can do. Rightly, this is an important priority for development in the current improvement plan.

- Practitioners make observations of children's learning using a variety of methods. All team members talk with confidence and insight about individual children's development and detail their progress over time. For the majority of children, this has been as they settle into their time in nursery. Very recently, the team have stopped using paper learning journals. Practitioners found the format of the first online tool they introduced was overly complicated. The team have worked with parents to introduce a new online application. There has been positive initial feedback and increased engagement by parents. The manager recognises that documentation of children's learning could be developed further to provide a more coherent and individualised picture. This is included as a key priority in the current improvement plan. Practitioners should ensure every child has a specific next step identified for literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing in the coming term. This will enable practitioners to engage parents in the progress children make in these areas.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning and developmental pathways

- Practitioners provide a curriculum that is play based, and their planning of learning continues to develop in line with national guidance. There is an improving balance between adult initiated and child initiated opportunities for children to develop literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing skills.
- Practitioners would benefit from continued support from the local authority to understand and develop further their curriculum. The manager should carry out plans to personalise the existing design of the school curriculum. Practitioners, children, families and partners involvement in shaping the design of the curriculum will be important. The team currently offer a wide variety of experiences for children. Developing the curriculum design together will provide opportunities to explore how to ensure depth and challenge for all children. The team should explore opportunities to work with 'digital leaders' in the school to enhance digital learning.
- Practitioners' planning for learning is structured using a three-year topic plan. This plan is not yet progressive or responsive to the age, stage and interests of children. The manager and team work hard within this structure to be child centred and responsive. Most experiences, interactions and spaces support a play-based, child led approach. Together with school staff, the team should develop further a shared pedagogy across the early level to ensure progression in learning for children.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on children and families – parental engagement

- Practitioners have close, supportive relationships with families. Parents and children enjoy well attended stay and play sessions. Practitioners appreciate the vital assistance parents provide to support local walks and events. Children are proud and excited to share their learning with parents at nursery.
- Keyworkers, practitioners and parents frequently share information about children's achievements. Effective use is made of daily contact in the playroom, closed social media groups and an online platform. Practitioners have current, detailed knowledge of children's strengths and challenges at home. A few parents would like more detailed information about their child's learning and development. It will be important for staff to agree realistic expectations of formats and frequency of updates with parents.
- The team has identified a need to increase parental engagement and consider family learning. Practitioners have arranged professional learning to support the reintroduction of parent groups. The manager should work with parents, partners and practitioners to agree the purpose of these groups. This will ensure they meet the needs and interests of the local community. Children enthusiastically learn about the world of work, as a few parents share their expertise and arrange visits, for example to a fire station.

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. At the time of the inspection, there were no identified areas for development.

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

- Practitioners understand and respond quickly to children's individual preferences and needs. Their careful, deliberate promotion of the wellbeing of children underpins the work of the team. Recently, as many children new to the setting settle in, this has focused on building relationships, understanding routines and developing children's independence. Most children understand and demonstrate care and respect for their friends in their play. Practitioners' interactions with children and families are consistently nurturing, responsive and caring. Trusting relationships are a key strength of the setting. There is a strong sense of community, where parents and children feel valued and important. All of this is having a positive impact on children's wellbeing and confidence.
- The team ensures that routines can adapt quickly to the differing needs of children across the day. Most children are developing good independence and self-care skills. Children are developing a good understanding of hygiene and how to keep their bodies safe and healthy. The team use praise well to motivate children and reinforce positive behaviour. Children are proud of themselves when they help set up snack or represent the nursery on school groups. Practitioners should continue to extend and develop the range of responsibilities children have across areas of the playroom and in routines.
- Children are at an early stage of developing their awareness of the national wellbeing indicators. Practitioners use appropriate language and wall displays to emphasise relevant indicators. Safety is discussed when children move equipment outdoors to climb higher. The team should now develop the full range of wellbeing indicators across all areas of their practice. This should support children, practitioners and parents to understand the health and wellbeing skills that children are developing.
- Practitioners plan a wide variety of opportunities and experiences that support children to develop further their understanding of health and wellbeing. Children explore how to keep themselves and one another safe as they join 'Wandering Wullies' walks in their local community. Most children develop their gross motor skills well through outdoor play, yoga, and activities in the school gym hall.
- Practitioners are aware of, and comply with, statutory requirements in relation to early learning and childcare. Further details on statutory duties, such as medication and child protection, are included in the Care Inspectorate section of this report.
- The manager and practitioners have frequent contact with visiting professionals. The team works in particularly effective partnerships with health visitors and speech and language

therapists. Practitioners implement strategies they have agreed with specialists. Good use is beginning to be made of the nursery as a space to hold meetings and assessments. As a result of effective partnership working with a range of agencies including speech and language therapists, children make good progress. The manager is persistent and resilient when sourcing and pursuing support for children.

- The nursery has an inclusive ethos with practitioners valuing and having high aspirations for all children. Practitioners value everyone as an individual and celebrate achievements of each child at home and in nursery. Older children understand and can talk about how to celebrate ways they are unique and special. Good use is made of stories and visitors to explore and value children's different needs and stage of development. As a result, children are respectful, inclusive and welcoming. The team should continue to celebrate equality and diversity in all aspects of their work, including as children learn about and celebrate a wide range of festivals.

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

- Across the setting, there is an appropriate focus on the health and wellbeing of children. Most children develop their gross motor skills well as they run, tumble, climb and balance in the outdoor area. Children persevere and co-operate, as they work as a team to make a spider web. Children's fine motor skills develop well as they manipulate dough, use tools to lengthen cardboard towers and use pencils and scissors with increasing control.
- Children benefit from frequent stories, songs and rhymes. Staff's emphasis on vocabulary, characters and sounds helps to develop well children's literacy skills and awareness of language. A few children use sounds, gestures or signs to communicate their needs. Most children are making good progress in their early language and communication. Children are enthusiastic and engaged as they mark make to write a letter, attach their name to their artwork or join well planned listening and talking activities. A few children are ready for more challenging activities as, for example, they attempt to write their own name.
- Children are making good progress in early numeracy. They count naturally when playing outside. They enjoy sorting, counting and matching using natural materials. Most children use mathematical language appropriately as they play to compare size, length and the shape of different objects in the construction area. Recently, children enjoyed collecting and measuring rainwater. A few children are ready for more challenging experiences to help them make progress in a wider range of early numeracy and mathematics skills.
- The setting has a highly inclusive ethos where children have well-judged support to help them to progress at their own pace. Practitioners work with children and small groups to improve language and communication. Children are making good progress in developing their language and communication skills. At present, these programmes work with all children. The team should develop further their use of data to inform how they select children for any future targeted interventions.

1.1 Nurturing care and support

We made an evaluation of good for this key question, as several important strengths, taken together, clearly outweighed areas for improvement. Whilst some improvements were needed, the strengths identified had a significant positive impact on children's experiences.

Children were happy, confident and had formed positive relationships with staff. We observed interactions between staff and children to be friendly and warm, staff were caring and responding to children at their level, which resulted in children approaching staff for help and support. We observed children receiving praise and encouragement, cuddles and reassurance when needed. Children's individual care needs were met by staff who were warm and nurturing in their interactions. Children were spoken to gently and with affection and were familiar with the routines of the nursery, and we saw staff supporting children well encouraging them to develop life skills through sharing resources, being kind to each other and taking turns.

Children enjoyed a positive, relaxed snack and lunch with a range of nutritious food options. This was a calm experience where children were encouraged to self-serve. Staff sat with children and encouraged friendly social interactions. This helped children to feel included, develop conversations and learn about healthy choices.

Children's personal plans contained relevant core information about children's individual needs. The service communicated effectively with parents through daily conversations, regular parent's meetings supporting staff to plan for each individual child. To ensure a consistent approach to documenting children's needs and how these will be met in line with current legislation and guidance we have asked the service to monitor and streamline recording methods to reflect 'how' staff are meeting and supporting individual needs.

We sampled the medication and consent forms held for children requiring medication. We found this was being monitored and audited in line with the current health guidance 'Management of Medication in Day care and Childminding Services'.

We sampled the nurseries safeguarding policy and found this to be in line with current guidance. Staff were aware of their roles and responsibilities in keeping children safe. They had recently attended a refresher course in child protection and knew how to address any concerns.

Care Inspectorate grade: good

1.3 Play and learning

Most children engaged well with the learning experiences on offer and were confident at accessing the indoor and outdoor environment. We found friendships were encouraged through play and learning experiences and positive interactions from staff. We observed opportunities for all children to play cooperatively, share and take turns which was promoting social skills and developing relationships with others.

Staff had a good understanding of child development, relevant theory and practice which was supporting children's play and learning experiences. Children were able to make decisions on where they wanted to play and had free flow access to outdoors. Staff were supporting children to explore their ideas and build on their interests. There was a focus on developing areas to engage

children's imagination and develop their language, literacy, numeracy and wellbeing. Children also had opportunities to develop play and learning through accessing the wider community and surrounding areas. This was supporting children's curiosity and imagination while developing life skills.

Strategies to record progress and achievements in wellbeing were in the early stages of development. We would encourage staff to further embed these to develop a broad range of life learning skills. This will support staff in ensuring children's wellbeing continues to positively progress over time. Staff should continue to develop child-centred planning, observations, questioning and the environment to support and develop play and learning further which will support staff to offer experiences that scaffold children's learning.

Children and families were supported through management having regular links with outside agencies, gathering, and sharing information in relation to children's health welfare and safety needs. Online profiles were providing a link with home, giving parents some information on children's experiences and time at the nursery. Online profiles should continue to be developed further to include more detailed observations of learning and next steps.

Care Inspectorate grade: good

2.2 Children experience high quality facilities

We made an evaluation of good for this key question, as several important strengths, taken together, clearly outweighed areas for improvement. Whilst some improvements were needed, the strengths identified had a significant positive impact on children's experiences.

Children were cared for in a large playroom that was welcoming, well ventilated and children had free flow access to a secure outdoor area. Staff ensured resources were suitable and accessible to the children and responded to requests for additional toys to extend and develop play. Children's artwork was displayed throughout which celebrated their achievements.

Furniture was child sized and there were some soft furnishings for relaxation and comfort for children to relax. Children had some space to play in small groups and by themselves. We discussed developing the environment further to create further cosy and quiet areas for children to rest or sleep.

Outdoors, children enjoyed exploring risky play as they climbed and investigated. Staff had developed the space to take account of children's stages of development and promoted curiosity and imagination through a variety of loose parts resources. The outdoor space was in the process of being developed, the service had recently had some groundwork carried out that was still in the process of being completed. We identified that some areas outdoors were in need of being developed further to create a more inviting space for children to play and enrich their learning. We recognise the service has put in place measures to mitigate the risk but would ask the provider to look at this further.

Overall, staff demonstrated good practice in infection prevention and control. For example, they modelled good hand hygiene, children were regularly reminded to wash hands at appropriate times such as before and after eating which encouraged them to develop healthy habits.

Risk assessments were in place or in the process of being updated for areas accessed by children. We would ask that management share these with staff and consider developing ways to involve children in assessing risk through their play and learning.

Care Inspectorate grade: good

3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well

We made an evaluation of good for this key question, as several important strengths, taken together, clearly outweighed areas for improvement. Whilst some improvements were needed, the strengths identified had a significant positive impact on children's experiences.

Since the last inspection, a new manager had been appointed within the service. We found the manager and staff worked well together creating a culture of shared responsibility. We could see that there were strong foundations in the newly formed team and are confident that the setting will continue to grow and move forward. The manager was open and honest throughout the inspection and promoted a shared vision along with staff in delivering a quality service to all children and families.

We discussed staff changes that had occurred since the last inspection and the challenges the service had faced during the Covid-19 pandemic, and how this had impacted on their improvement journey. The manager should now consider ways of gathering the views of children, families, and staff to ensure they are meaningfully involved and influence change within the setting through developing the services vision, values and aims as part of their improvement planning.

We acknowledged that the service had plans in place to support improvement. We found management had developed an improvement plan and monitoring calendar identifying the service priorities. We can see some progress had been made on priorities identified. We saw that the setting used some processes for self-evaluation. Quality assurance, including monitoring and self-evaluation now needs to be more firmly embedded into the process of evaluating and improving the nursery as a whole. It would be helpful for the manager to visit the Care Inspectorate HUB where they will find 'The Model for Improvement' which provides a framework for developing, testing, and implementing changes. This would enable the manager to monitor change and the impact to support more reflective practice and improved outcomes for children.

Care Inspectorate grade: good

4.3 Staff deployment

We made an evaluation of good for this key question, as several important strengths, taken together, clearly outweighed areas for improvement. Whilst some improvements were needed, the strengths identified had a significant positive impact on children's experiences.

The nursery was appropriately staffed to meet the needs of most of the children. Staff were appropriately deployed throughout the day which ensured they met most children's needs at the right time. Transitions were planned and children were familiar with the daily routine. Staff were effectively supported by the manager who spent regular time in the nursery. This helped to build positive working relationships and allowed time for professional discussion. Staff were happy, engaging and sharing tasks through working as a team. Staff lunches were organised to minimise disruption ensuring the day ran smoothly to support the play, care and learning of the children.

The ethos throughout the service was a focus on the children as individuals ensuring that all staff treated children with respect. We found there was shared care and responsibility for all children. Staff worked well together as a team and their different skill sets and knowledge complimented one another resulting in good interactions with the children. Staff communicated well with each other and worked together to ensure effective supervision and quality engagement with children across the day.

Staff had time at the end of the day to discuss children individually and as a team plan for the following day. This gave staff the opportunity to reflect on their day and identify any areas of improvement. Staff meetings were held regularly to discuss, planning, supporting children, what was working well within the nursery and any areas they wanted to improve. The manager and staff should continue to develop lines of communication to ensure all staff are updated regularly in relation to any changes that occur.

Staff had a yearly appraisal with the manager to discuss performance and training. The manager should continue to have regular supervision sessions with staff on a one-to-one basis these should be formally recorded with staff identifying areas of development and support with practice.

Care Inspectorate grade: good

During the previous Care Inspectorate inspection, the setting had two recommendations. These two recommendations have been met. As a result of this inspection, there are no requirements or recommendations.

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.