

Summarised inspection findings

Stramash Outdoor Nursery, Fort William

The Highland Council

19 December 2023

Key contextual information

Stramash Outdoor Nursery is part of a larger group of four outdoor nurseries who operate as a social enterprise. The nursery works in partnership with Highland Council to provide funded early learning and childcare (ELC) for 34 children at any one time. Stramash Outdoor Nursery operates from two extensive outdoor spaces in the rural setting of Fort William. Their open, natural spaces include a variety of structures for rest and sleep, toilets, a lunch space and a 'yurkee' an indoor space where a small group of children can join in activities such as baking. There are places for children aged from two years until they start school. Parents can also self-fund places or purchase additional hours for their children. At the time of inspection around half of the children aged three or over attend on a full-time basis. Other children spend part of their week at Stramash, with the remainder of their time in another setting, or at home. 59 children on the roll attend on full or part days between 8.00 am and 5.30 pm over 48 weeks of the year.

Two managers share responsibility for the leadership and support of the diverse team. The management team have led the setting through significant periods of change. The staff team includes qualified practitioners and trainees. Many staff are currently being supported to gain additional qualifications or awards.

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

- Relationships between children, and between children and practitioners are positive and nurturing. As children arrive in the setting, they quickly connect with staff and are immediately settled and absorbed in their outdoor play. Practitioners listen to children attentively and respect their autonomy and ideas. This approach supports children to feel secure and confident to explore their interests, in their own way. Most children are patient and caring towards one another, they play well independently and with others. All practitioners should continue to use praise when children are responsible or kind towards others. This will continue to reinforce positive behaviour and shared values of the setting.
- Most children engage well in their play, often for extended periods of time. Routines and activities are flexible and respond well to the preferences and needs of children as individuals. Children can choose experiences that interest and motivate them. Almost all children spend most of their day outdoors navigating different surfaces and heights, learning about birds and berries, or sharing stories with staff. Practitioners offer planned experiences that support children to work together as they take turns and follow instructions to bake a healthy snack for their pet rabbit. Practitioners recognise that they need to continue to improve the balance between adult and child-initiated activities. Most practitioners are skilled in adapting activities to involve children of all ages. The team respond well to the specific needs and interests of the youngest children. The team support younger children well to develop their schemas as they

transport materials and resources. Children would benefit from increased access to technology to enhance and document their learning.

- Practitioners have a detailed knowledge of children's care needs, home circumstances, abilities, and preferences. They apply this knowledge well as they play alongside, question or help children to engage with their peers. Most practitioners are skilled as they ask open ended questions and use reference materials to explore and develop further children's knowledge of minibests. The team recognise they now need to develop further their understanding of children as learners. Practitioners have created new 'story' books to document interesting group learning experiences and enquires that children have enjoyed. These books do not yet reflect the progress children make in their learning. The team should continue to develop further their work to support children to reflect on their own learning, skills and achievements more regularly.
- Practitioners are responsible for documenting children's progress using an online platform that is shared with parents. These diaries include photographs, notes and videos included in children's diaries share the wide variety of engaging activities children participate in. A few focused summaries and observations include specific examples of children's progress in an increasing number of curricular areas. Practitioners benefit from reinstated team meetings that include specific discussions about children's progress and how best to support children who require additional support. The management team have made a positive start to improving the frequency and focus of practitioners' observations of learning. Practitioners need to improve their skills and confidence in how to identify, assess and record significant learning for each child. The team should develop further how they use what children know, can do and have already achieved to influence their work.
- Practitioners support children who require additional support with their learning effectively. The team are consistent as they consistently implement strategies and adapt interactions and spaces to ensure they are accessible and appropriate. The team work closely with parents, health visitors and other specialists to regularly review and evaluate agreed approaches. This ensures strategies used remain appropriate and effective.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

- The setting 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.

3.2 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

- Children make good progress with their communication skills and early language development. Most children express their ideas using gestures, and ask questions using their well-developed vocabulary. They talk confidently as they suggest ideas for games or share knowledge about the natural world with adults. A few children role play in the 'yurkee' or use dolls to develop their imaginative play. Most children enjoy listening to stories and sharing books at daily planned story sessions and when accessing books independently. A few children recognise and match the letter and initial sound of their own name to letters and words in the environment. The majority of children would benefit from increased opportunities to mark make and write for a purpose in a wider range of play and real-life situations.
- Children make good progress in numeracy and mathematics. Children enjoy using natural materials to explore how they can count, compare, or measure quantities and lengths. Most children use simple mathematical language with understanding as they explore weight and sort toys and blocks by size. Children are highly motivated to explore volume and capacity as they collect, transport rainwater. Most children are ready to develop their skills and understanding across a wider range of mathematics and numeracy activities.
- All children make very good progress in their gross and fine motor skills as they challenge themselves to use tools to help create structures. Children navigate around, under and over obstacles both on foot or as they explore on their balance bikes. Children demonstrate their increasing confidence, resilience, and self-belief as they assess and manage risk. Children who require additional support make good progress as they learn to share, take turns and express their ideas. All children demonstrate increasing independence and well-developed self-care skills as they change clothes or access resources they need. Children would benefit from increased opportunities to develop their early understanding of diversity and fairness.
- Children make good progress over time as they explore the possibilities of the natural world in their outdoor setting. Children benefit from a wide range of activities where they participate in decisions about and actively make improvements and changes to their nursery. Parents report their child's increased knowledge about the natural world as they plant, grow, forage and care for plants and trees in the nursery. Almost all children frequently problem solve and are creative and curious as they respond to the impact of changes in the seasons. Children are relaxed and purposeful in their learning throughout their day.

- Children's records of learning capture important information about their experiences, their personalities, and preferences. The team recognise that their online records and new 'story' books do not yet capture, celebrate, or build on children's wider achievements. Practitioners should use their knowledge about children's success at home and in other settings to build more consistently on what children already know and can do.
- The team demonstrate an inclusive, trusting, respectful approach with all children and their families. Practitioners know and understand children, their home circumstances, their extended families, and any additional challenges children may face. Support for parents to access all weather clothing, and the creation of a drying room aims to reduce additional costs for families and staff. The team should continue to explore how they use data about barriers children may face to identify how to best support families. This may include exploring how to create or signpost families to parent support groups.

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.