

Summarised inspection findings

Newtonmore Primary School Nursery Class

Sgoil-Àraich Sgoil Bhail' Ùr an t-Sleibh

The Highland Council

17 June 2025

Key contextual information

Newtonmore Primary School Nursery Class - Sgoil-Àraich Sgoil Bhail' Ùr an t-Sleibh is located in a purpose-built extension to the existing school building. The accommodation consists of three large indoor play spaces and a small outdoor play space. Children have free-flow access to all the play spaces for most of the day. The nursery and sgoil-àraich uses additional spaces within the school building, the school grounds and the community to enhance children's learning experiences.

The sgoil-àraich and nursery class is registered to provide early learning and childcare (ELC) for a maximum of 48 children at any one time. It caters for children aged from three years to those not yet attending primary school. The provision offers both English and Gàidhlig medium ELC. Two weeks prior to the inspection the Gàidhlig medium and English medium ELC provisions merged into one joint provision. This is a temporary arrangement until there is the full complement of staffing available for the nursery. At the time of inspection, there were 23 children registered to attend the setting. Seven children are registered for English medium ELC provision and thirteen for Gàidhlig medium ELC provision. Three children are registered for a blend of Gàidhlig medium and English medium provision.

The nursery operates during term-time and is open 8.40 am to 3.15 pm Monday to Thursday, and 8.40 am to 12.20 pm on Friday.

The headteacher is the registered manager of the setting and has strategic responsibility for the nursery class and sgoil-àraich. There have been significant staffing changes over the past eight months, including changes to senior management and to sgoil-àraich and nursery staffing. Currently, there are three early years practitioners and one support worker.

In June 2024, the headteacher and principal teacher left the school. Since then, there has been significant instability in leadership. The subsequently appointed headteacher was in post between August and October 2024. An acting headteacher was in post for four weeks in September 2024. Between October and December 2024 there was a different acting headteacher for four weeks. In the remaining time between October and December 2024, local authority officers provided leadership support when required. Since January 2025, a local authority officer has served as the acting headteacher. The principal teacher was not replaced and there are no other senior leaders in the school.

1.3 Leadership of change	unsatisfactory
<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the setting and its communitystrategic planning for continuous improvementimplementing improvement and change	

- Overall leadership in the nursery is unsatisfactory. The frequent changes to the headteacher post have resulted in practitioners receiving a lack of thorough and consistent guidance. Local authority officers need to take urgent action to support practitioners to develop a clear understanding of national practice. Local authority officers need to support practitioners to look

beyond the setting to enable them to improve experiences, interactions and learning environments that will better support children's learning and development.

- In both English and Gàidhlig medium, the vision, values and aims were created in consultation with parents in 2023 and are clearly displayed on the nursery wall. These are not the same as the school vision, values and aims. Children do not yet demonstrate an awareness of the nursery values and practitioners do not refer to them with children. Local authority officers need to support practitioners to collaborate with school staff to create vision, values and aims that reflect the aspirations of all stakeholders. This should help to develop a shared understanding of the purpose of the nursery and sgoil-àraich and build a sense of belonging to the school community.
- Practitioners are aware of the national self-evaluation framework, 'How good is our early learning and childcare?'. They are not yet using this framework to routinely evaluate the work of the nursery. Recently, the acting headteacher carried out a few observations of learning and teaching in both English and Gàidhlig medium. However, the identified actions have not yet been undertaken by practitioners. Local authority officers need to support the acting headteacher to monitor rigorously the work of the nursery. They should support practitioners to evaluate their practice on a regular basis. Currently, there are no clear priorities identified for the nursery or sgoil-àraich in the improvement plan. As identified, there needs to be a detailed plan in place for the nursery and the sgoil-àraich to help practitioners take forward improvements. Local authority officers must monitor progress identified within the plan robustly and evaluate the impact of actions.
- Practitioners do not yet have identified leadership roles. Local authority officers should support all practitioners to develop leadership roles. These roles should reflect the skills and talents of individuals in the team and ensure roles relate to improvement priorities. This should support improvement priorities effectively and secure improved outcomes for children.
- All children undertake leadership roles such as snack helpers and risk assessors to begin to develop responsibility. A positive next step would be to include children in a wider range of experiences to develop further their leadership skills.
- All practitioners take part in professional learning related to their statutory duties. They demonstrate a willingness to undertake further professional learning to support them to improve practice within the setting. The local authority must support practitioners to access relevant professional learning that will help to improve children's learning experiences and progress in learning.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

unsatisfactory

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

- There are major weaknesses in the quality of learning, teaching and assessment within the nursery. As a result, children's learning and achievements are significantly impacted. Local authority officers need to take urgent action to improve the quality of learning, teaching and assessment.
- Overall, children are happy in the setting. Most settle quickly to play with their friends. They demonstrate independence as they move between the indoor and outdoor environments. Too many children are not motivated or engaged in significant learning. Most children are not challenged by resources to develop and extend their thinking. Local authority officers must support practitioners to evaluate rigorously the quality of experiences. This should help to ensure all children have opportunities to be curious and creative as they learn through play.
- Overall practitioners are kind and supportive in their interactions. At times, practitioners communicate effectively with children to extend learning. These interactions are not yet of a consistently high-quality. Frequently, practitioners miss opportunities through which children could learn. Local authority officers should support practitioners to develop further their understanding of quality interactions. They should focus on extending learning through open-ended questioning, supporting children to develop their knowledge of the skills they are developing. Children should have a key role in leading their own learning. Practitioners should now ensure they offer opportunities for children to enrich their learning using digital technologies.
- Practitioners capture and record observations of children's learning in journals. These are available for children to access throughout their day. However, children do not use these journals to talk about their learning. Local authority officers should support practitioners to identify and record the children's skills, their learning and next steps. Practitioners need to gather actively children's and their parents' views and other examples of children's learning. This could ensure observations and professional judgements are robust and inform planning reliably.
- Children do not benefit from a planned curriculum and experiences that develop their learning. Planning for learning takes account of a few children's ideas and interests. Practitioners use routines productively to enable all children to hear and begin to use the Gaelic language they are acquiring. Local authority officers need to support practitioners to plan learning which offers appropriate breadth, depth and challenge for all children.

- Local authority officers and practitioners urgently need to develop an overview of children's individual progress. Practitioners do not use thorough assessment approaches to make informed decisions regarding the progress children are making. As a priority, local authority officers need to support practitioners to track children's learning and progress. This should lead to improved outcomes for children and ensure continuity and progression within and across the early level of Curriculum for Excellence.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning and developmental pathways

- There is an urgent need for local authority officers and practitioners to review the quality of experiences and spaces across the nursery. Children should have access to natural, well-resourced, open-ended resources that sustain their interest, both indoors and outdoors. Local authority officers should support practitioners to make good use of national documentation to inform the curriculum. They must ensure that practitioners understand their role in developing a flexible, child-centred curriculum with effective total immersion approaches for children in sgoil-àraich.
- Children benefit from an environment which has natural light and easy access to the outdoors. However, resources are too limited and too structured. Children's interests and ideas do not influence the provision available. As a matter of urgency, local authority officers and practitioners should review the pace and balance of the nursery session to fully meet the wider range of children's needs.
- Practitioners have established links with the local care home where children play games, make crafts and sing songs with the residents. Practitioners use community spaces well to enhance children's outdoor learning, opportunities for physical play and to learn about the world of work. Local authority officers should support practitioners to continue to develop learning experiences that exist within the local community.
- Local authority officers should ensure that children access full-time provision in either Gàidhlig Medium or English Medium ELC. This should ensure that they make the best possible progress and continue their language learning journey as they transition to P1. Practitioners should collaborate with teachers in P1 to plan for progression across the early level. This should include a shared understanding of learning approaches and provide a continuous curriculum experience for every child across early level.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on children and families – parental engagement

- Overall relationships with families are positive. Practitioners are available to speak with parents at the start and end of the day. Practitioners invite parents to meetings twice a year to share children's learning journals. Practitioners should, as planned, reintroduce opportunities for learning journals to go home to keep parents better informed of their children's progress in learning.
- Local authority officers should support practitioners to develop a calendar of events across the year to support parental involvement and family learning. This could include stay and play sessions, story and song sessions and outdoor learning experiences. This could provide parents with information about how to support their children's learning and development 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 that need to be addressed as a matter for urgency.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

weak

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

- Overall, practitioners have positive relationships with children and families. Most children enjoy being at nursery. They play together, share and take turns and follow routines well. They are learning to be respectful of the nursery environment. Practitioners are at the very early stages of supporting children to recognise their emotions. They provide quieter calm spaces for children to relax and rest. Local authority officers should help practitioners to ensure quieter spaces are warm, nurturing and provide an appropriate selection of resources to support children to talk about and manage their emotions.
- Most children are developing well their awareness of wellbeing. They talk about healthy food choices and follow handwashing routines confidently. Most children are aware of activities that help them to be active. A few children recognise their own achievements, particularly in relation to dressing for outdoor play. Most children know who the people are who can help them to keep safe. Most children use cutlery and scissors safely.
- Most children have appropriate experiences at snack and lunchtimes. Children make their lunch choice when they self-register each day. They are developing well their independence as they serve their own food at snack and collect their meal at lunch time. Practitioners should review snack routines to reduce waiting times and ensure snack provision adheres to national guidance. All children benefit from unhurried mealtimes where practitioners eat alongside the children. This is supporting most children to develop social skills well.
- Practitioners know their statutory responsibilities in early learning and childcare. Most have first aid qualifications, and all have undertaken child protection training. Their progress in taking forward the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education by providing learning and play through total immersion has been hindered due to merging the provision.
- All children have a care plan to support their care and wellbeing needs. The majority of children who require additional support have plans in place to support their care and learning needs. Local authority officers must take immediate action to support practitioners to identify all children who would benefit from additional support with their learning. They should ensure all identified children have plans with clear targets, which are reviewed regularly. Parents and partners should be fully involved in setting these targets.
- Practitioners should develop ways to help children understand diversity out with their environment through a wider range of cultural celebrations. They should provide a wider range of multicultural story books, resources and experiences that challenge stereotypical thinking. This could support further all children to feel valued and develop their understanding of diversity and inclusion.

3.2 Securing children's progress

unsatisfactory

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

- There are significant weaknesses in securing children's progress. All children are not yet making progress that they have potential to achieve in numeracy, communication and language skills.
- In English medium early language and communication, children are making insufficient progress. Practitioners should consider how to support and develop early language and communication skills through a literacy rich environment. Most children talk happily to each other during play. Some enjoy looking at books and listen well to stories. A few children would benefit from targeted support to increase their confidence when talking in groups. A few experiment with mark-making and use pencils at the writing table. All children need access to a wider range of high-quality resources and experiences in real-life contexts to support better progress.
- In early numeracy and mathematics across the nursery, children are making insufficient progress. There are too many missed opportunities to promote mathematical understanding and thinking throughout interactions, experiences and spaces. Practitioners need to consider how they can embed experiences for mathematics into their play, daily routines and real-life experiences. They should extend children's opportunities to explore number and number processes, money, shape, measure, pattern, time and information handling. This should help children to acquire new skills, language and make better progress in all areas of mathematics.
- Children are making satisfactory progress in health and wellbeing. Children cooperate when waiting their turn to use limited resources. A few children develop their fine motor skills when using modelling dough, mark-making or preparing snack. Most children are making progress in their gross motor skills through energetic play when they visit the gym or the playing fields. Children do not have enough opportunities to participate in energetic play to develop their gross motor skills throughout the week. Practitioners should ensure urgently that children have daily opportunity to develop gross motor skills through large physical play. Practitioners should ensure that children learn about caring for their teeth and participate in regular daily tooth brushing.

- The range of children's documentation does not clearly demonstrate children's progress over time. Local authority officers should support practitioners to gather a wider range of significant assessment information focused on children's learning and achievements. These should be reviewed regularly to demonstrate the children's progress and identify appropriate interventions. This should support practitioners to gain a deeper understanding of children as learners and provide clearer focus to ensure equity for children requiring additional support.

Context

Sgoil-Àraich Sgoil Bhail' Ùr an t-Sleibh – Newtonmore Primary Nursery experienced changes two weeks prior to this inspection. The sgoil-àraich (nursery) was providing Gàidhlig Medium Education, with children being immersed in the language in one playroom, in previous years and for most of this session. Recently, as a result of staffing challenges, the sgoil-àraich and nursery have temporarily merged. Local authority officers should consider urgently reinstating separate English and Gàidhlig Medium provision to ensure that high-quality total immersion early learning and childcare can be effectively delivered in Gàidhlig. This would be in line with the priorities within the local authority's Gaelic Language Plan.

QI 1.3 Leadership of change

- The vision, values and aims of the sgoil-àraich have recently been reviewed. The values are different to the school's values. Moving forward, local authority officers should support practitioners to simplify and link values more closely to the school values. Practitioners need to make children aware of the values and what they mean to them, in an age-appropriate way. Local authority officers need to support and inspire the practitioners within the sgoil-àraich. They should also strengthen the partnership between the sgoil-àraich and the school. Children enjoy the role of 'snack helper' and are ready to take on more leadership roles.
- The headteacher and staff are increasing the uptake for the sgoil-àraich. Practitioners should continue to increase the visibility of Gàidhlig across the nursery environment to help all children connect with the language and culture. A few children in English medium nursery are benefitting from increased exposure to Gàidhlig as a result of the children coming together. Practitioners should look at other ways of ensuring the merging of the two settings does not negatively impact on total immersion.
- The acting headteacher and practitioners in the Sgoil-àraich have yet to engage with relevant documentation specific to Gàidhlig, including the Advice on Gaelic Education. They urgently need to do so to support improvements in their practice. Local authority officers need to support practitioners to develop thorough self-evaluation across the sgoil-àraich. This could assist practitioners in reflecting, identifying and implementing areas for improvement more relevant to early years and Gàidhlig total immersion.

QI 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

- Children are settling well into a changed environment and a new set of routines. This is following the sgoil-àraich and nursery being recently merged. Practitioners with responsibility for Gàidhlig need to provide children with activities that promote children's fluency in Gàidhlig through their regular use of the language. It is important for total immersion that practitioners initiate activities in which children hear and learn Gàidhlig, in a planned and progressive way. This is more challenging to achieve within a larger group and the current set-up. Consequently, children are missing out on total immersion play through Gàidhlig and most spend long periods of time not hearing Gàidhlig.
- Practitioners use routines well throughout the day, including story-time and snack, to reinforce important language. This is supporting all children in basic Gàidhlig language learning. Practitioners should increase their use of songs and extend role play to support further children's learning of Gàidhlig within the playroom and outdoors. Practitioners should respond to children's interests and involve them in talking about planning their own learning. This should be while protecting the use of high-quality total immersion. These approaches are

currently difficult to put into practice with interactions for a majority being through the medium of English.

- Practitioners record children's learning in floorbooks. They assess children's learning as they observe and engage with them in their play. Practitioners should continue to develop their recording of clearer observations, focussing on the skills being developed and what is significant for each child. This should include what children do, say and understand in Gàidhlig. Local authority officers should support practitioners in their approaches to planning and tracking progress. Practitioners would benefit from visits to other Gàidhlig settings and working with teachers of Gàidhlig Medium Education in the school and across the cluster. This could help them to develop a shared understanding of children's progress across early level.

QI 3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

- Children attending the sgoil-àraich have positive relationships with practitioners. Practitioners are at the early stages of introducing language of the wellbeing indicators to children. Children in the sgoil-àraich will require regular reinforcement and repetition of these in Gàidhlig. Practitioners should include a daily focus on supporting children to develop an awareness of their emotions and the language to express how they are feeling. They have yet to introduce children to rights in a developmentally appropriate way.
- Children engage in visits within the community, for example to a local café and post office. Practitioners should develop plans to make these outdoor experiences more regular and high-quality. This could help children to develop their understanding of the local area.
- Local authority officers should plan strategically so that all children whose parents choose Gàidhlig Medium ELC receive total immersion. They need to return to a sgoil-àraich and English medium nursery arrangement that fully enables total immersion. As a result of the merger, all children who choose Gàidhlig are not receiving their full early language acquisition entitlement.
- Local authority officers must support practitioners to ensure appropriate procedures are in place to identify, record and review the progress of children who may require additional support in their learning. Children in the sgoil-àraich who require additional support benefit from enhanced transition arrangements as they progress into P1. Practitioners need to support children to develop their understanding of diversity and equality as part of total immersion play and learning.

QI 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

- Overall, children are making sufficient progress in early literacy, Gàidhlig language and communication. Most children who have been attending sgoil-àraich are developing well their skills in listening as practitioners read stories to them. Most children are beginning to understand the Gàidhlig used during routines. They name the fruits and colours during snack. Children join in singing songs in Gàidhlig during weekly visits to the P1-3 Gàidhlig medium class in the school. Children need more mark-making activities and role-play across play contexts within the sgoil-àraich.
- Most children are making appropriate progress in numeracy through regular counting activities as they play. They sort items into groups and record these on a chart. Children need to hear adults using more measure language in Gàidhlig through total immersion play experiences.
- Most children are making satisfactory progress in health and wellbeing. Children enjoy preparing and taking part in snack experiences. This helps them to develop their social skills, which enables them to begin to speak Gàidhlig for real and purposeful reasons.

- Practitioners record children's progress within development overviews. They are not yet tracking the progress children are making in Gàidhlig language. Practitioners should celebrate children's successes and achievements and share this information between home and sgoil-àraich.
- All practitioners know children and families well. Practitioners should engage regularly with parents to help them support their children's language learning in Gàidhlig.

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.