

Summarised inspection findings

Farr High School Nursery - Bettyhill

The Highland Council

21 January 2025

Key contextual information

Farr High School Nursery - Bettyhill is part of the North Coast campus and is situated in the remote and rural village of Bettyhill in Sutherland. The campus includes primary schools and nurseries at Farr, Melvich and Tongue and also Farr High School. Farr High School Nursery provides early learning and childcare (ELC) places for children living in the village and surrounding areas. Children can attend from the age of three until starting primary school. The setting is registered for 20 children to attend at any time. Currently there are six children on the roll.

Children attend between 8.45 am and 3.30 pm Monday to Thursday and 8.45 am and 11.45 am on a Friday, during school term time. There is one playroom and a conservatory with direct access to an enclosed outdoor area. The depute headteacher has delegated responsibility for the nursery. She also has leadership responsibility for another primary school and nursery as part of campus arrangements. The headteacher oversees the strategic leadership of the nursery.

Two experienced practitioners have worked together for over ten years and are responsible for day-to-day operation. There have been periods of absence with supply staff assuming responsibility for a term last year. The post of support assistant is currently vacant.

1.3 Leadership of change

very 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

- Practitioners are highly skilled, professional and demonstrate enthusiasm and passion in their delivery of ELC. They provide positive role models to children and work together as a strong, supportive team. Together, they have a clear vision for high-quality ELC, and they strive for continual improvement. They are led by the highly-effective depute headteacher who has an extensive knowledge of ELC and provides a very positive role model. She is sensitive and compassionate in her leadership and is very well respected. The depute headteacher has successfully navigated staffing challenges to ensure positive outcomes for children are secured and improvement has continued.
- The team have worked successfully with parents to create a shared vision for the nursery. This has helpfully been kept under review to ensure it reflects the aspirations of current families. Senior leaders are aware they could develop further the vision to ensure the aims and values of their practice are explicit. Practitioners could use the vocabulary of the vision more plainly with children to help them understand how they link to their actions and learning.
- Practitioners show a strong commitment to developing themselves as professionals to ensure they offer high-quality support to children. The depute headteacher and practitioners participate in an interesting range of professional learning that significantly informs and influences their practice. They are empowered to identify and take forward their learning and leadership responsibilities that build on their skills, interests and the identified needs of the nursery. This includes developing outdoor learning and understanding how to support children to

self-regulate their emotions. This is impacting positively on children's learning and the quality of provision.

- The depute headteacher has created and implemented a comprehensive annual calendar for evaluation and ongoing monitoring of the quality of the nursery. Working with practitioners, she also makes effective use of self-evaluation frameworks to evaluate the quality provided and identify aspects that could be further improved. As a team, staff are reflective and make extensive use of national and local guidance to ensure their practice is kept up to date. The team regularly review improvements they have made, and how these impact on the quality of provision. They gather the views of children and families to ensure everyone has a say in evaluating the quality of provision. As a result, senior leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and aspects that could be even better. They have used this to create an appropriate plan for improvement. Priorities include developing children's awareness of future careers and empowering practitioners to lead adventurous outdoor learning.
- Children have simple leadership responsibilities, including helping with routines and caring for the environment and resources. Practitioners could support children to build on existing leadership opportunities, appropriate to children's individual developmental stages.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

very 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 have created a respectful ethos and child-centred approaches that demonstrates a strong commitment to children's rights. Children are confident, very happy and feel safe and secure. Practitioners are extremely respectful, loving and nurturing of children and ensure children influence their nursery experience. Children are very motivated and engage for extended periods of time in their chosen activities. Practitioners have carefully developed spaces and resources for learning to offer opportunities for children to be curious, make decisions and explore. They are highly responsive to children's interests. This allows children to have a key role in leading their own learning, often through real-life experiences.
- Practitioners have very good understanding of how children develop and learn. They know children as unique individuals and as learners and use this knowledge very effectively to support their learning. Practitioners interact with children using a sensitive and skilful balance of commentary and questioning that consolidates, extends and challenges learning. They model and encourage the use of complex vocabulary for children using a very child-centred approach to learning. This includes an effective blend of child-led and adult-initiated experiences. Children are developing an awareness of themselves as learners and practitioners support this through discussions about what children may learn next.
- Practitioners use digital technologies very well to support children's learning. Children are learning to use matrix bar codes to access favourite stories and take photographs to document their achievements. Practitioners could continue to embed the use of digital technologies to help children develop a range of skills that enhance and extend learning.
- Practitioners observe children as they learn and record and share children's progress and achievements in learning profiles. They make careful, personalised observations of learning, significant to individuals, that support accurate judgements about children's progress. Their observations and professional judgements reliably inform their planning. Practitioners effectively use local authority developmental milestones and trackers to ensure children's learning is progressive. They work closely with senior leaders to ensure a shared understanding of children's progress. They could build further rigour in assessment by making greater use of networks beyond the setting to promote a deeper, shared understanding of children's progress.
- Practitioners make very effective use of assessment information and their deep knowledge of child development to provide resources and invitations to play that stimulate, excite and provoke curiosity. This is very individualised with each child having a personal plan to progress their learning. As a result, children who may have barriers to their learning or benefit from challenge are very well supported.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning and developmental pathways

- Children experience a curriculum that takes full account of national guidance. Practitioners use their extensive knowledge of what children should learn as part of the early level to inform the curriculum offer. They are working with staff from P1 to develop a shared understanding of continuity and progression. They should continue to extend and enhance the curriculum offer by maximising the potential afforded by the 3-18 campus.
- Practitioners are developing the use of curriculum design principles in a focused way. This is helping review and evaluate the quality of children's experiences. As a result, practitioner's awareness of breadth and challenge in learning has developed significantly. They are also supporting parents and children to explore and begin to understand the importance of the design principles.
- Senior leaders and practitioners support children as individuals as they begin nursery and move onto school. Buddies, from the primary school, are selected at P6 and work with nursery children through the transition into P1 and beyond.
- Practitioners are exploring how children can be introduced to the work of work through creative use of the community. This builds on already effective use of the local community to enhance the curriculum. They regularly visit a nearby 'fairyland', the local shop, café, fire station and surrounding area.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on children and families – parental engagement

- Practitioners work in partnership with parents and know everyone very well as part of the local community. They have purposeful interactions at the beginning and end of each day. Parents also have opportunities to play and learn with their child during organised sessions and are invited to share their profession, skills and hobbies. Practitioners could consider building on this positive partnership by inviting parents into the playroom with children daily to share learning. Practitioners share information about nursery events using an online platform. This also fosters two-way communication, for example, providing a way for families to share learning and experiences from 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. At the time of the inspection, there were no identified areas for development.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

very 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

- Positive relationships are a key strength of the nursery and are evident between children, practitioners, families, and senior leaders. Practitioners have a strong focus on the wellbeing of children, their families and each other. Senior leaders provide sensitive and responsive support to practitioners to ensure they can be highly effective in their role. There is a strong sense of family and community with everyone valued and supported to play an equal role. Children interact very well with their peers and are polite and respectful of others. Practitioners are very positive role models in their interactions with children and each other. They use their understanding of brain development to help them provide valuable support to children to ensure their wellbeing. Almost all children are developing skills in turn taking, negotiating, and cooperating and are developing resilience in their play and learning. As planned, practitioners should support children to have a deeper understanding of their rights. This could helpfully be linked to the developing values and aims of the nursery.
- Senior leaders and practitioners ensure children have a strong voice in influencing their nursery experiences. Children are actively consulted on decisions that affect them, for example, directing their learning. Practitioners are attuned to children and carefully listen and respond to their verbal and non-verbal cues. They provide helpful visual supports to help children recognise, understand and manage their emotions. Practitioners use the national wellbeing indicators to check the needs and progress of children. Children understand how to keep themselves safe and healthy through real-life experiences. They understand the role of the emergency services, how to use tools safely and how to keep safe in the community. Children are becoming independent in self-care and enjoy preparing their own snacks each day.
- Senior leaders and practitioners have a well-developed understanding of statutory duties and diligently keep up to date with guidance and advice. They are clear about their responsibilities to keep children safe and ensure care and wellbeing needs are met. Practitioners readily identify when children may require additional support to secure progress in learning. They are proactive in equipping themselves with the knowledge they need to help them to offer the right support to children when they need it. This includes collaborating with other professionals and developing their own understanding to create individual approaches for children to ensure positive outcomes.
- Practitioners have created a very inclusive ethos where everyone is treated equally and with respect. They introduce children to cultures that are unfamiliar to children's immediate experience. They should continue to develop ways to help children understand and respect a wide range of differences, including outwith their immediate experience.

3.2 Securing children's progress

very 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 are making very good progress in communication and early language. Almost all children listen very well to stories and can talk about their favourite texts. They use a range of words confidently and are very well supported by practitioners to develop complex vocabulary. Children are curious and readily question what they don't understand or know. Almost all children confidently express their thoughts and ideas. They represent their ideas through a range of drawings and modelling. Almost all children are developing the physical abilities to begin to write. They benefit from exploring mark making and early writing in different contexts, at their own developmental stage. A few children's drawings are very detailed and they choose to engage for extended periods of time. Most children are interested as they explore letters, begin to identify associated sounds and match sounds to letters.
- Children are making very good progress in numeracy and mathematics. They count confidently and recognise numbers readily in the environment, for example, shoe sizes and traffic signs. A few children enjoy the challenge of exploring larger numbers, simple addition, and different ways of counting. Children confidently use the language of measure as they compare volume and order for size. They apply their developing understanding in real life situations such as baking, browsing recipe books, visiting the local shop and snack routines. This is helping them explore measure, money, time, shape and simple fractions.
- All children make very good progress in health and wellbeing as a result of the child-centred and individualised approaches. Children are very confident and are responsive to the high expectations of practitioners. All children are developing a range of fine and gross motor skills through stimulating and challenging experiences. These include manipulating dough, using tools, preparing food and negotiating uneven terrain. They persevere when they encounter challenge and are becoming increasingly resilient.
- Practitioners' tracking of learning clearly demonstrates children are making very good progress in their learning over time. Assessment information indicates accurately that all children are on track to meet local authority developmental milestones, with a few making accelerated progress. Children who have potential barriers to their learning are making very good progress. This is ensuring that all children are making the progress that they are capable of and any potential gaps in learning are limited.
- Almost all children are confident and have a strong sense of achievement and pride in being part of the nursery and wider community. They benefit from exploring their local community

and are developing a strong identity and sense of place. Practitioners encourage families to share children's learning from home. They should progress plans to help children develop skills and contribute to the wider community and beyond as global citizens.

- Senior leaders and practitioners have a sound understanding of the needs of children and their families within the local context. They understand the unique challenges within their local community and have created an inclusive and supportive ethos that promotes equity for all. The Parent Council provides helpful financial support to ensure equity for all. Senior leaders use a range of information and data to check the progress children make in their learning. This helps them identify where children may benefit from more targeted support or challenge. They should continue to explore all available data, for example attendance information, to inform decisions about any future interventions.

Practice worth sharing more widely

In the nursery, practitioners are highly skilled in interacting with children to develop their interests and understanding. They carefully observe what children do and say to determine where interactions would have the most impact. This helps them recognise when best to interact or continue to observe. As a result, children are very active in leading their learning. Practitioners interact with each child in a way that best suits their learning style and needs. They use a carefully considered and very effective balance of commentary and questioning to engage children in learning. This often deepens and sustains their interests and engagement in learning.

Practitioners are highly responsive to opportunities to introduce children to interesting, and often challenging vocabulary. They use their skills in observation to identify natural occasions to highlight unfamiliar words in contexts that have captured children's interests. Children are very receptive to this and demonstrate curiosity about language. As a result, they are making very good progress in early language and communication.

1.1 Nurturing care and support

Children were very happy, settled and having fun. They experienced genuine warmth and caring approaches, supporting children to feel nurtured and loved. Staff were compassionate and responsive in their interactions, resulting in very strong attachments being formed. This contributed to an inclusive ethos and meant all children were confident and engaged in their play experiences.

Children's overall wellbeing was supported through effective use of personal planning. Staff worked in partnership with parents to ensure effective information sharing. As a result, staff had a very good knowledge of children's holistic needs, which enabled them to provide continuity in their care. Staff worked proactively with other professionals which supported them to identify strategies of support based on individual needs. Staff were attuned to children's individual needs and used strategies consistently and effectively, supporting them to reach their full potential.

Children experienced unhurried mealtimes in a relaxed, positive atmosphere. Their independence was encouraged through opportunities such as, self-serving, pouring their own drinks and chopping fruit. This helped to build their confidence and life skills. Staff recognised the opportunity to build on relationships and joined children at mealtimes which promoted meaningful conversations. This contributed to the sociable experience for children and allowed an opportunity for emerging language skills to be developed.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: very good

1.3 Play and learning

Children had fun and were actively involved in leading their own play and learning experiences. Staff demonstrated a genuine interest in supporting play as they valued the importance of children having fun. Interesting, exciting materials and provocations promoted children's curiosity and creativity. They were enabled to make independent choices about where they played and moved confidently between the playroom and the outdoors. Staff interacted skilfully to support children's curiosities. This meant that interests were responded to in the moment as staff engaged with children to deepen their learning.

Children were very well supported to develop their skills in language and literacy and consolidate their learning through play. Staff confidently scaffolded their learning experiences, for example, staff provided new vocabulary through play to extend their learning. Opportunities for numeracy and maths were naturally woven into children's play and learning. Children explored counting, number, time, size, and shape through everyday experiences. As a result, they were happy, confident, and making very good progress.

Interactions between staff and children were carefully considered and were respectful of children's rights, wishes and choices. Staff carefully observed play and timed interactions to create a balance of opportunities which allowed children to investigate and explore for themselves. This contributed to children feeling valued and enabled them to lead their learning in a meaningful way.

Planning approaches were child centred and responsive to children's interests. Effective use of tracking children's development and progress across the wider curriculum supported staff to plan intentional learning experiences and allowed for additional supports to be planned for and

implemented. As a result, children were developing a broad range of knowledge, understanding and skills for life.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: very good

2.2 Children experience high quality facilities

Children accessed an environment that was warm and welcoming. Playrooms were decorated in neutral colours which promoted a natural, calm environment. This fostered a welcoming atmosphere for the children. The addition of homely touches, fairy lights and carefully considered furnishings, promoted a feeling of coziness. This supported children to feel valued and gave a strong message that they matter.

Children had opportunities to rest and relax in safe, cosy areas. Blankets and cushions were available for children to independently access. This enabled children to seek out a calm area where they could have some individual time if needed. This supported children's emotional wellbeing.

Carefully considered play spaces took account of children's developmental needs. Children's interests and curiosities were reflected in the environment which contained an extensive variety of high-quality provision that supported play. The staff team ensured that areas were well presented and organised. This meant resources were readily available to provoke children's interests and supported them to explore the environment independently and encouraged imaginative play.

Children had direct access to the outdoor garden space, giving them good opportunities for free flow play between indoors and outdoors. They moved freely between the play areas and engaged in a variety of outdoor play experiences. Children used the outdoor space with confidence and experienced enjoyment, challenge and fun. Areas to climb, run and balance outdoors provided opportunities for children to develop their gross motor skills.

Staff implemented infection prevention and control routines to minimise the potential spread of infection. Children were encouraged to wash hands frequently and at appropriate times. Established routines meant children were supported to be healthy. The manager had identified that nappy changing facilities were not in line with best practice. At the time of the inspection no children required support with personal care. However, the manager had plans in place to ensure that suitable arrangements were available should this be required. The provider agreed to advise the Care inspectorate when the work to improve this was undertaken and completed.

Staff had good knowledge and understanding of our SIMOA (safety, inspect, monitor, observe, act) keeping children safe campaign and this supported them to ensure children were accounted for at all times. Staff communicated very well with each other regarding numbers of children and which area they had chosen to play in. This created a safe and secure environment where children could enjoy a variety of play experiences supported by effective staff practice.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: very good

3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well

Children, families, and staff benefitted from a committed and strong leader. They promoted high aspirations for children through a shared vision. This created a happy and welcoming ethos in the service promoting a positive atmosphere for children to play and learn. The positive ethos meant staff were proactive in taking shared responsibility for change and improvement. Consequently, children were supported by a staff team who were motivated and responsive to meeting their needs.

High quality care and support was achieved by effective quality assurance systems, including effective self-evaluation. The manager had implemented monitoring and auditing across the service leading to continuous improvement. Staff were skilled, passionate and motivated, and worked well together. Continuous reflection of practice and regular opportunities for professional discussion brought about positive changes for children and families.

The manager and staff demonstrated their commitment to the service and were motivated to make improvements to ensure positive outcomes for children. A realistic improvement plan was driving forward nursery developments. Ongoing monitoring and reviewing of the priorities meant the manager and staff had a clear overview on their progress. This meant children benefitted from a service that continued to improve.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: very good

4.3 Staff deployment

Children were cared for by staff who were warm, compassionate, and nurturing. Staff provided individualised support by positively engaging with children. They demonstrated an awareness of when and how to intervene, picking up on cues to support children's wellbeing and extend their play experiences. This resulted in children who felt respected within the service.

Children benefitted from a service that was appropriately staffed to meet their needs. Effective staff deployment across the service meant that the right number of staff were meeting children's individual needs, consistently throughout the day. Staff were proactive in recognising any gaps and ensuring effective supervision and quality engagement with children.

The skills, knowledge and experience within the small staff team contributed to positive interactions, play and learning experiences for all children. They communicated well and worked together to ensure children were safe and engaged in quality experiences throughout the day. This allowed routines and key tasks to be carried out whilst ensuring children were appropriately supported and outcomes remained positive. As a result, children experienced a very calm, nurturing experience.

Positive working relationships had been formed between the staff which meant they were meaningfully contributing to the inclusive and positive ethos of trust and respect. The staff team worked collaboratively and supported each other well. Regular meetings and support from the manager engaged staff very well in the process of reflecting on practice. This meant that staff felt valued and empowered to grow professionally and provided children with a happy, secure, and supportive environment.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: very good

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.