

30 August 2016

Dear Parent/Carer

**Dalmonach Early Education and Childcare Centre
West Dunbartonshire Council**

Recently, as you may know, my colleague and I visited and inspected your child's early learning and childcare (ELC) setting. Throughout our visit we talked to parents and children and we worked closely with the head of centre and staff. We wanted to find out how well children were learning and achieving and how well the ELC setting supported children to do their best. The head of centre shared with us the ELC setting's successes and priorities for improvement. We looked at some particular aspects of the ELC setting's recent work including new approaches to develop children's literacy and numeracy skills. As a result, we were able to find out how good the ELC setting was at improving children's education. I would now like to tell you what we found.

How well do children learn and achieve?

Children arrive at the setting keen to learn. They are greeted warmly by staff and demonstrate great enthusiasm for learning as they quickly seek out activities and contexts for play. A short welcome time with their key worker provides a positive start to the session before children lead and direct their own learning. Children are extremely friendly and confident. Many engage very well with the wide range of stimulating and exciting resources on offer. They sustain and extend their play very well. For example, outdoors, a group of children excitedly used small metal detectors to search for missing coins for the tooth fairy. Children particularly enjoy play contexts which allow them to create, explore and investigate. Taking very good account of this, staff provide a wealth of interesting contexts to promote this kind of learning. Children and staff plan many activities together such as, designing raised beds for the garden. Children carefully planned the project, identifying which materials were required to build it. Commendably, children also recognised that their plants needed protection and decided that plastic bottles could be used as mini greenhouses for this purpose. Children clearly benefit from the skilful interactions of staff who encourage children to shape and direct learning. We have asked staff to build on this further to enable children to have a clearer understanding of what their own next steps in learning are.

Children are making very good progress across their learning. Children have a love of books and like to share stories with staff and each other throughout their session. Recently, children have been reading different books written by Julia Donaldson. They can retell many stories themselves and can identify the main characters. They enjoy the opportunities they have to engage with the books in fun ways such as, dressing up as the 'Smartest Giant in Town'. Children can recognise rhyme in stories. A few children proudly shared with others the silly nursery rhymes they had created by themselves. Children regularly write as part of their play. They write their own letters and cards for family members. Most children are very keen to talk to each other and to staff and visitors. A few children confidently talked about their learning using their learning journeys and learning walls. Most count confidently in different contexts throughout the session. Children concentrate very well when applying their numeracy skills across their learning. As they play in the 'Monkey Maths' area children count and record the number of insects on display. They make very good use of an interesting 'counting machine' to explore different amounts. This is helping them develop an understanding of addition in a fun way. Children use a wide range of appropriate mathematical language in the course of their play. We observed this as they explored filling containers with water and as they sorted sticks according to size. We saw that the observational skills children have are benefiting their art work. There are some lovely examples of children's art work on display throughout the playroom. Children display well-developed skills in running, balancing, jumping and climbing. The outdoor space provides both exciting and challenging contexts for children to develop these skills.

How well does the early learning and childcare setting support children to develop and learn?

Staff meet the learning needs of children in an exemplary way. Led very well by their head of centre, staff are committed to securing the best possible outcomes for children. Staff are fully aware of each child's developmental and learning needs. The recent changes to the nursery routine now allow for a calmer and more purposeful learning environment which benefits all children. Throughout the attractive setting, children access a wide range of resources. Staff make adaptations where necessary, to ensure all children can take part in activities. Bespoke home link resources are in place to ensure all children can share their learning with family members. Staff work well with a range of partners to support children who require additional help with their learning. Many of you told us how much you appreciate the support and reassurance you receive from the head of centre and staff, particularly in challenging times. Staff regularly review individual children's progress to ensure all are appropriately challenged and supported in their learning. The collective work of staff, partners and parents ensures that all children are making the best possible progress.

The curriculum reflects national guidance well. A notably strong emphasis is placed on developing children's literacy and numeracy skills across their learning. Commendably, this is achieved through interesting play contexts. There is a well-judged balance between adult-led and child-led play. As a result, children are keen participants in their learning. We are pleased that staff are encouraging parents to share their skills and expertise. This is supporting children to link their learning to the world of work. Staff are also implementing a new programme, 'Single

steps to learning' which supports these skills well. Staff have been developing new successful approaches to develop children's literacy and numeracy skills. The forest school programme provides children with an exciting context to learn about the natural world, as well as learning to work with others. The setting has very good arrangements in place to support children as they start nursery and move onto primary school.

How well does the early learning and childcare setting improve the quality of its work?

The head of centre and staff are committed to providing the highest quality of learning and care in Dalmonach Early Education and Childcare Centre. Staff are keen to take on additional training and there is clear evidence that this is having a positive impact on children's learning experiences. The head of centre encourages staff to take on key leadership roles within the setting, such as forest schools and reciprocal teaching. Staff are keen to involve parents in leading improvements in the setting. The parent partnership group plays a key role in developing aspects of the provision such as developing the outdoor area. They recently consulted children to create a magical fairy garden. This is a much loved part of the outdoor area. The Environmental Trust, another valued partner, is also supporting new developments in the garden area. The head of centre is very well respected and valued by the whole school community. A high number of parents shared with us how much they value her relentless efforts in securing the best possible outcomes for their children. She places each child and their family at the heart of everything she does. She greets every child and their family as they arrive each day. She maintains a notably prominent presence in the playroom, providing staff with a strong positive role model. With staff, she has developed new approaches to identifying which areas to improve. She is supported very well by the team leader and early years teacher. Together, they provide strong leadership to secure significant improvements. We have asked staff to continue to develop their approaches to assessment.

Our inspection of your ELC setting found the following key strengths.

- Well behaved, polite children who demonstrate great enthusiasm for learning.
- Children's progress in their learning.
- Staff commitment and enthusiasm which is securing continuous improvement of children's learning experiences.
- Outdoor learning environment which provides a wealth of exciting learning contexts.
- Inspirational leadership of the head of centre to secure the best possible outcomes for children and their families.

We discussed with staff and West Dunbartonshire Council how they might continue to improve the ELC setting. This is what we agreed with them.

- Continue to improve the curriculum as planned.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the ELC setting's self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further visits in connection with this inspection. As part of the arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of the ELC, the local authority will inform parents about the setting's progress.

Jackie Maley
HM Inspector

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations for your setting can be found on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/eyc/DalmornachEarlyEducationandChildcareCentreAlexandriaWestDunbartonshire.asp>

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