

Summarised inspection findings

Lochcarron Primary School Nursery Class
Sgoil Àraich Loch Carainn

The Highland Council

25 March 2025

Key contextual information

Lohcarron Primary School Nursery is situated in the small, rural village of Lochcarron within the Wester Ross area of the Highlands. The nursery is located in the grounds of Lochcarron Primary School. The nursery is registered for a maximum of 20 children at any time, currently there are 14 children aged two to those up to primary school age on the roll. The nursery operates from 8.55 am – 3.20 pm Monday to Thursday and 9.00 am to 1.00 pm on a Friday, during term time.

Accommodation comprises of one shared large playroom and kitchen. There is free flow access to an enclosed outdoor area. The nursery also has shared access with the school to a football pitch, a playpark, an outdoor garden, which was developed by the nursery team, and two shelters. The beach and Kirkton Wood, offers easily accessible outdoor learning.

The acting headteacher took up post in August 2024 and is the named manager for the nursery. She also has leadership responsibility for another primary school and nursery. A nursery teacher supports the setting one day every two weeks. Staffing consists of three early years officers who work various patterns equivalent to two full-time posts. One early years worker supports lunch cover two hours per day.

1.3 Leadership of change

satisfactory

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

- The nursery shares the school's vision, values, and aims which are focused on learning together to improve our future and the future of the world. Staff recently updated the vision, values and aims in consultation with parents to ensure they represent the local community. All practitioners bring the values of being kind, brave and respectful to life well. This is achieved positively through the day-to-day experiences they provide for children. This includes an ethos of helping each other and respecting individuals' choice and privacy. Staff should continue to refer to the vision and values in a meaningful, age-appropriate way for children.
- The senior leadership team are approachable and give direction to the strategic running of the nursery. Practitioners value this support and feel confident to lead improvements. Senior leaders offer advice to practitioners to further improve nursery provision and the quality of children's learning. Practitioners undertake training and share their learning with each other. This is helping improve their understanding of how young children learn and develop. Together, the team recognise that continuing to use practitioners' talents will increase further the capacity for nursery improvement. This should now include the development of children's opportunities for leadership through regular age-appropriate roles and responsibilities within the nursery.

- Senior leaders and practitioners continue to place a high priority on improving the early learning and childcare they provide for all children and families. Practitioners welcome and use well monthly self-evaluation activities as an opportunity for reflection. They have worked collaboratively with the school to improve the outdoor environment used by the children. This has increased the regularity of outdoor learning in the wooded area. The changes practitioners have made are having a positive impact on children's experiences and learning, as children show curiosity and creativity. Staff should continue to evaluate and reflect on children's experiences both indoors and outdoors.

- Children having the very best start in life is a clear priority for the setting. Senior leaders implement a well-balanced quality assurance calendar. Practitioners are fully involved in and take forward regular self-evaluation. They share with families what activities are working well. This raises parents' awareness of children's learning and helps parents to further support improvement. Senior leaders should now provide opportunities for staff to share practice and moderate across early level and with cluster nurseries.

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

- All practitioners are enthusiastic, caring and sensitive to the needs of children. They create an environment that is relaxing and inclusive. As a result, all children enjoy their time in the nursery. Children are motivated and enthusiastic in their play and learning. They engage for extended periods of time as they investigate "mysterious events". For example, they use and understand the purpose of magnifying glasses as they creatively look for clues to problem solve.
- Practitioners help children interact positively with each other. Practitioners adapt their vocabulary to support younger children and older children to build positive relationships. A few children would benefit from increased opportunities to explore and identify their emotions.
- Practitioners understand how young children learn and develop. They give children the appropriate amount of time and freedom to lead their play. This develops children's creativity and confidence to contribute their ideas. Practitioners offer quality interactions and use a range of open-ended questions with children to extend their thinking. They are responsive to children's learning needs and interests. Children are independent as they get ready for outdoors and enjoy free flow play to large outdoor spaces. Practitioners' professional knowledge results in confident, well-informed interactions between children and practitioners.
- All children have learning profiles that document their learning and includes practitioners' observations, children's comments, and interesting photographs. These are shared with parents. Practitioners should consider ways to support children to have more involvement in contributing to their profiles. This should help children to be more aware of their own progress in learning.
- Practitioners use a local authority assessment and progression framework effectively which is underpinned by national Benchmarks and guidance documents. They track children's learning in early language, early mathematics and self, social and emotional wellbeing. This provides detailed information to show progress in learning. Senior leaders monitor children's profiles and give practitioners valuable feedback which leads to improvements for children.
- Practitioners plan well over different timescales and are responsive to children's interests from nursery and home. Practitioners provide a balance between adult-initiated and child-initiated experiences. They meet regularly with a distinct focus to discuss information gathered from developmental overviews. They use their knowledge and observations of children to agree how to support and challenge children. The acting headteacher has recently introduced a tracking tool which should help to show progress children make over time. This will support progression for children at early level as they move into P1.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning and developmental pathways

- Practitioners implement a flexible progressive curriculum through play effectively, using Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) experiences and outcomes. The curriculum is child centred and responsive. Practitioners promote nurturing attachments for all children. All children have a strong sense of ownership to play spaces inside and outside the nursery. Spaces are well resourced and support and enable children to play and learn in a variety of ways.
- Children are developing important skills well in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing through curricular experiences which are well matched to almost all children's needs. Staff need to review and consider progression pathways to ensure younger children's curricular experiences take account of breadth and challenge in all curricular areas.
- Practitioners use national guidance to deliver curricular pathways which include exciting, play experiences particularly outdoors for children. They take particularly good account of children's interests when developing these to help ensure positive outcomes for children. Practitioners consider carefully how they develop children's skills in curiosity and inquiry and recognise the principle of choice.
- The acting headteacher should continue to consult parents on their preferred medium of learning in the nursery. Parents make a choice for their children to access Gàidhlig Medium Education at P1. They should also consider the benefits of earlier total immersion at the beginning of the early level through nursery education.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on children and families – parental engagement

- Practitioners have established very positive relationships with parents and families. They keep parents well informed of children's progress through meaningful daily conversations at drop off and pick up times. Parents feel welcomed to join in stay and play sessions. These termly opportunities are a valuable time for parents to look at their child's learning profile and to build further the trusting relationships between practitioners and parents.
- Children's future learning targets are sent home regularly. Increasingly, parents' comment and are engaging in planning future learning opportunities for their children.
- Staff engage parents in surveys to gather their views, for example a detailed evaluation on termly stay and play sessions and the use of digital technology in the nursery.

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.

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

- Children's wellbeing is an important focus for practitioners. Staff support children to learn in calm, relaxed and nurturing spaces, both indoors and outdoors. Each child is recognised as an individual, with their own needs and rights. All children are regularly involved in decision making. They undertake meaningful risk assessments in the stimulating, nursery garden, where they are becoming very aware of the importance of safety. A few children learn best outdoors, and this is recognised and planned for.
- Staff's caring and respectful relationships with children are a strength. Children understand their own wellbeing needs as a result of staff's strong focus in this area. Practitioners role model language of wellbeing during everyday experiences. This results in the majority of children talking confidently using the wellbeing indicators.
- All staff know their statutory requirements in relation to safeguarding and child protection. Staff work with health partners effectively to address individual children's needs. For example, practitioners work well with speech and language partners to implement effective strategies which help children's communication and language skills. As a result, children make very good progress in communication and language. Care plans are updated regularly and within appropriate timescales. This captures significant and important changes in children's care and learning needs.
- All children receive a hot lunch within the school canteen. They collect their plated chosen lunch and clear away dishes and food at the end of lunchtime. The acting headteacher currently has the nursery lunch time under review to consider a shared lunch experience with the younger children from the school. This should help make the nursery lunch experience a more sociable event for nursery children. In addition, it would provide an opportunity for the older children to role model appropriate independence and social skills needed at lunch times. Children are independent in some areas at snack time. There is scope to extend further children's skills and add roles and responsibilities during all mealtimes.
- Practitioners are sensitive in their identification of concerns around children's development. They seek support and receive professional learning from partner agencies where appropriate to create a partnership approach to removing barriers to learning. They provide support for individual children who require additional support with learning, depending on specific need. Senior leaders and key workers should now ensure individual learning plan targets are more specific and measurable.

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

- Almost all children are making good progress in early language and communication in line with their own stage of development. They listen and follow simple instructions and routines well. They make marks in floorbooks and draw various recognisable pictures. A few children write words and use texts appropriately to communicate. For example, they make posters for the wall and use environmental print for different purposes. Almost all children enjoy 'reading' familiar books with adults and most know the roles of the author and illustrator. They can retell and extend stories very well when playing. The majority of children use detailed language during their play. A few children create in depth interesting stories with little adult support. Children benefit from hearing Gaelic songs and stories when younger children from the Gaelic Medium class visit. This helps to increase children's awareness of Gaelic language and culture.
- Children are making good progress in numeracy and mathematics. They apply their understanding of number as they count regularly in both English and Gaelic in everyday experiences. Most children recognise three-dimensional objects during opportunities for block play. They appropriately use the language of mathematics, whole and half, while cutting and spreading at snack time. They use tallest and smallest accurately when measuring during play. They naturally and correctly use positional language as they navigate challenges within the woods. Practitioners have correctly identified they should provide children with additional experiences and resources to ensure maximum progress is made in all aspects of this curriculum area.
- In health and wellbeing, children make good progress. They are developing the skills of sharing and taking turns which helps them to play cooperatively with their peers. Children are practising getting themselves ready for outdoors with a little adult support. Children skilfully navigate the outdoors to develop skills in running, climbing, cycling. Children develop fine motor skills well through manipulating playdough, using scissors, digging and collecting water from the stream in the woods. Children should continue to be encouraged to tidy up and look after resources.
- Since starting nursery, children continue to make progress in their learning. For children new to the setting, they are becoming more independent and confident within the environment. They explore the different areas of the playroom and outdoors confidently. Practitioners discuss children's learning on a weekly basis and record their progress on local authority trackers. This information demonstrates that children make progress since starting the setting.

- Parents share information on children's achievements from home through completing the detailed 'learning from home' form and through regular discussion with staff. Practitioners celebrate these achievements and those from the nursery meaningfully throughout the day. They recognise this further with parents at termly stay and play sessions to help children further achieve success. Building on this, the team could seek ways to develop children's skills further through early leadership and citizenship opportunities within the local community.
- The nursery is a very inclusive learning environment which ensures all children have a rich nursery experience. Practitioners have a very good knowledge and understanding of the needs of children and families. Children attending the nursery class have the option to transition into Gaelic Medium Education at the school. Children and staff from the Gaelic Medium class visit the nursery weekly for beneficial learning experiences. However, children in the nursery do not benefit from learning Gaelic through total immersion play within the setting. The acting headteacher should continue to consult parents on their preferred medium of learning in the nursery.

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.