

# Summarised inspection findings

**Dounby Community School Nursery**

Orkney Islands Council

17 June 2025

## Key contextual information

Dounby Community School Nursery is based within Dounby Community School building. It serves the village of Dounby and the surrounding rural area. The nursery comprises of two large playrooms with free flow access to outdoor play spaces. Children also access facilities within the school, such as the games hall and community rooms. All children currently attending are aged three and over. The nursery is registered for 44 children. At the time of inspection, 30 children attend a range of morning, afternoon or full day sessions. The nursery operates 9.20 am to 3.20 pm for 43 weeks of the year. There are extended hours offered each morning and several afternoons. A nursery manager and senior practitioner lead and manage the setting and practitioner team. Currently, two staff job-share both senior leadership positions. This means they split their working weeks equally between roles as nursery manager and senior practitioner. In recent years, there has been an increasing number of parents choosing to defer their child's entry to P1.

### 1.3 Leadership of change

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

- Senior leaders and practitioners have previously shared values, such as valued, respected, supported and nurtured, to help underpin the ethos and work of the nursery. Children currently attending the nursery and their families were not part of this earlier work. They do not fully understand how these values relate to the daily life of nursery. Practitioners are beginning to consult children in relevant and developmentally appropriate ways to seek and gather their views. As planned, senior leaders and staff should continue to review and refresh their vision, values and aims to reflect fully the unique context of the nursery and its community.
- Senior leaders have established and continue to foster an effective culture of improvement. They support practitioners effectively to undertake relevant professional learning. Recent areas of training have been the quality of children's learning experiences and developing approaches to build on children's interests and curiosity. Senior leaders support practitioners to participate in regular 'good conversations'. These conversations are used productively to review what is going well in their practice, identify any training needs and to support ongoing professional development. Practitioners are reflective about their work and understand their role in improving outcomes for children. They are taking on leadership roles across the nursery with increasing confidence. These roles align well with nursery improvement priorities, such as leading on creativity, wellbeing, and outdoor learning. Practitioners are developing thoughtful ways to evaluate the impact of the changes they are leading. Recently, they created floorbooks to document progress and gather evidence. These are beginning to demonstrate the positive impact that staff leadership is having on outcomes for children.
- Across the nursery children confidently lead their learning, share ideas, and enjoy seeing their views inform new projects and their nursery spaces. Almost all children help to carry out daily nursery routines with a sense of purpose. A few children have individual leadership

responsibilities, such as watering the plants and recycling. Senior leaders should continue to explore meaningful opportunities to support children to build on and develop their leadership skills.

- Senior leaders have strengthened processes to support the leadership of change in the nursery well. They use self-evaluation and information from quality assurance effectively to inform change and set appropriate priorities for continuing improvement. Senior leaders and practitioners have taken forward key priorities which have had a positive impact. These include improved approaches to planning and children's lunchtime experiences. Children enjoy well-planned activities that are matched well to their interests and needs. Lunchtimes are now more relaxed for children, helping them practise independence and develop important social skills. Staff capture children's voices meaningfully as part of their evaluations. Senior leaders should continue to develop further approaches to gathering the views of families and partners as part of their evaluations.
- All staff work well together as a team. Nursery manager and senior practitioner roles and remits are in place, however how these responsibilities are shared across the week is not yet fully understood by all practitioners and families. Senior leaders should clarify their roles and responsibilities and how these are carried out over the week. This will help support practitioners with operational aspects of their work.

## 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 create and foster an inclusive, welcoming and motivating ethos where children feel confident making choices and influencing their play and learning. Staff are committed to improving outcomes for all children and supporting children's rights. Strong nurturing relationships between practitioners and children that support learning are a major strength of the nursery. Children feel safe, happy, and supported throughout their day. They show kindness and respect for one another and display high levels of cooperation when playing together in small groups and pairs.
- Overall, children are highly motivated. They enjoy exploring a variety of well-planned learning spaces and activities that match closely their learning, stage of development and interests. Practitioners provide high-quality, open-ended experiences and projects that spark children's curiosity and creativity. Children sustain their interest in experiences for increasing lengths of time and develop a deep understanding in their learning.
- Across the nursery, there is a very well-considered balance between adult-led and child-initiated learning. All interactions between practitioners and children are sensitive, encouraging and supportive. This is a major strength of the nursery. Practitioners use commentary and open-ended questioning highly skilfully to encourage children to process their thoughts and ideas. They support children very well to come up with their own answers or to solve any challenges for themselves. Practitioners are highly skilled at providing the correct levels of support for each child. They understand when to offer support and when to step back. This supports children to progress very well in their learning, independence, and develop important skills.
- Practitioners use digital technology well across the day to capture key moments of play and learning. Children enjoy looking back at photographs on displays and recall events with pride. Practitioners support children to use tablets to answer questions and to find out more information about topics of interest. Practitioners should continue broadening children's use of digital technologies in meaningful ways and for a variety of purposes.
- Practitioners know children very well as individuals. They observe children by joining them regularly in episodes of play across the setting and outdoors. This helps them to write high-quality 'peedie' notes of conversations that capture learning taking place very well. Practitioners also carry out focused observations across the year to create high-quality individual learning stories. These detailed stories identify key features of children's play, developing skills and next steps in learning. Children enjoy using their journals to reflect on their learning. Children can also take their learning journals home to share with their families which they do with pride. Practitioners share children's experiences successfully with parents through online newsletters and updates. This helps parents to understand and share in their children's learning. Senior leaders and staff moderate the consistency of written observations

captured within 'peedie' notes. Staff also recently developed agreed standards to support their confidence further in making judgements on children's progress. This is helping to build a deep, shared understanding of nationally expected standards.

- Practitioners are highly responsive to each child's interests and ideas. This is reflected well in their planning processes. They use children's ideas and observations to plan engaging learning spaces and experiences. This supports children very well to develop their ideas and deepen their learning. Practitioners plan regular key group times where children come together to focus on developing specific skills related to key areas of learning. This enables staff to provide support which is tailored very well to meet the needs of individual children.
- Practitioners plan very well for children's learning across a range of core provisions, key group activities and recently introduced project planning. They use Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) experiences and outcomes and local authority guidance effectively to support this. All planning is responsive to children's needs and interests whilst offering progression. Practitioners gather information to inform their planning using shared 'big boards'. This captures what is working well and next steps for children's interactions and experiences across the nursery. This approach helps practitioners to make well-timed, informed adjustments to support children's learning across the curriculum and wider cross-cutting themes.
- Senior leaders make effective use of the local authority tracking tool to identify and record the key skills children are developing during their time at nursery. Senior leaders also meet with practitioners to discuss children's learning. Staff use these approaches well to monitor individual children's progress and to identify their most appropriate next steps in learning. Practitioners are becoming increasingly confident using evidence in learning journals to make accurate judgements on children's progress. Senior leaders could now monitor children's progress overall as a cohort more regularly, particularly as an increasing number of children are spending a third year at nursery. This should help staff to support all children further to make the best possible progress and plan further challenge where required.

## 2.2 Curriculum: Learning and developmental pathways

- The nursery has a relevant and meaningful curriculum in place. It is based on providing all children with a wide range of play based experiences across the curriculum delivered through a continuous provision. This includes the use of small group work and project planning. Practitioners track this effectively using the experiences and outcomes from CfE and local authority developmental milestones. Children have the opportunity to develop early literacy and numeracy skills through meaningful indoor and outdoor experiences. Practitioners ensure children's experiences are matched to their interests, learning needs and stage of development. Their planning of the learning environment and children's experiences is flexible and highly responsive to enable children to develop their interests and lead their play.
- Practitioners make very effective use of community partners to enrich the curriculum. For example, the local care home, shop, hairdresser and health services. Practitioners have recently extended the range of partners by involving parents and local islanders to share their skills, knowledge and talents with children. This has broadened and deepened children's learning about their island, wider community and the world of work.
- Children and families are supported very well during transition into the nursery. Practitioners work well with families and partners to understand the emotional needs and stages of development for each child as they enter nursery. They carry out home visits to ensure the transition into nursery is tailored well to meets the needs of children as best as they can. Senior leaders and practitioners ensure key information is shared on children's progress to enable children to make a smooth transition from nursery into school. Children take part in a number of regular transition and play opportunities to support them move from nursery to P1. This helps children settle quickly and to continue to build on their learning.

## 2.7 Partnerships: Impact on children and families – parental engagement

- Parents feel welcomed and included in the life of the nursery. They are encouraged to contribute to their child's learning journals and take part in meetings to review their children's progress. Recently developed achievement displays help parents share children's success from outside of nursery. Drop off and pick up times enables staff and parents to meet informally to discuss progress and share information about children.
- All practitioners value and respect parents as partners. Parents feel they are able to develop important and trusting relationships with staff. Senior leaders and practitioners are exploring further ways to involve parents in the life of the nursery. They are keen to increase parental participation and engagement through a programme of family learning events. Staff use existing opportunities such as 'coffee mornings, stay and play' well as a method to gather parental views on the improvement priorities of the setting. Staff gather and share useful information for families, signposting them effectively to services that can offer support to parents.

## 2.1 Safeguarding

- 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. Areas for development have been agreed with the setting 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 and their families are supported to develop a sense of belonging. Practitioners are positive role models and encourage children to express themselves. They use a range of effective strategies and resources to support children to understand and express their emotions and deal with any disagreements. Children feel understood and listened to. They maintain good friendships and play well together. Children understand and demonstrate a small number of the wellbeing indicators. Forest school and outdoor learning, such as learning to ride bikes, helps them to develop their understanding of how to keep safe and manage risk. Senior leaders should continue to develop children's understanding of wellbeing and how this relates to their life.
- Children are important contributors in decision making across the nursery. This includes, for example, the development of the environment and selecting resources. Children have a strong sense of purpose and ownership in the nursery. They feel included as decision makers and can talk about how their thoughts and views have led to changes in the nursery. For example how loose parts outdoors have been developed to help construct tractors and boats. Children's voices are displayed prominently in floorbooks and throughout the nursery environment. Practitioners are working to support children more effectively to develop an understanding of their rights. This will help children build a deeper sense of rights.
- Children participate actively in a social lunchtime routine within the playroom. Practitioners sit with them and engage in calm, meaningful conversation. This allows children the opportunity to enjoy their food and engage in relevant conversations and discussions about the food they eat. Most children are developing their food tastes and tolerances and will more willingly try new things. Children develop a wide range of skills through participating in snack and lunchtime routines such as helping to set up for lunch. They are becoming increasingly independent as they self-select their food, pour drinks and clear away their lunch when they are finished.
- Senior leaders have undertaken relevant training in relation to child protection and safeguarding. Practitioners are confident in their knowledge of the statutory requirements in relation to child protection and safeguarding. Senior leaders should monitor children's needs closely and involve relevant partners to address and support any barriers that arise.
- All staff have a good understanding of children's care needs and meet them with sensitivity and care. Practitioners have a clear awareness of children who may require additional support with learning. They engage with and seek advice willingly from partner agencies where necessary. Practitioners work alongside parents to create appropriate and detailed personal care plans for all children to provide effective support, plan targets and implement strategies to help children develop their individual needs well. Practitioners should ensure all care plans are up to date and contain all of the relevant information about children's needs.

- Practitioners promote inclusion and equality throughout the setting and in their planning of environment and resources. The play room reflects well aspects of island life. Children take part in intergenerational visits which helps them to develop their understanding of others and builds their confidence to take part in activities within the local community. Practitioners should continue to find ways to celebrate and make visible diversity and different cultures within the local community and beyond. This will support children to gain a better understanding of the diverse nature of the world in which they live.

### 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

- Most children make good progress in communication and early language. A few children make very good progress. Children make the most progress in talking and listening and reading. Most children can listen and follow simple instructions. They ask and respond to simple questions. A few children can use advanced vocabulary and hold more in depth conversations when developing their talking and listening skills. Most children can choose books, and join in songs, rhymes and stories. A few children can anticipate and predict what comes next. They can recognise letters and their name when developing their reading skills. Most children develop their fine motor skills through manipulative play and recognise that text holds meaning. A few children show increased pencil control and draw more detailed pictures while developing their writing skills. Across the nursery, children would benefit from opportunities to use digital tools to support their reading more independently when adults are not available. Practitioners should continue to review the number and range of opportunities for children to apply and develop further their skills as writers across the indoor and outdoor experiences.
- Most children make good progress in numeracy and mathematics. A few learners make very good progress. Children make the most progress in numbers, shape and measure. Most children can recognise numbers and count on and back up to 10, copy simple repeating patterns and name two dimensional shapes. Across the nursery children are developing well their mathematical language as they play and learn in the block play and woodwork areas. A few children can complete simple addition and subtraction. They can find missing numbers in a sequence up to 10 and use comparative language when they measure. Children would benefit from further opportunities to develop their understanding of information handling and money using real-life contexts.
- Practitioners support children's health and wellbeing development effectively. Almost all children are motivated and participate actively in a range of indoor and outdoor experiences with confidence and enthusiasm. Children are happy, settled and relaxed at nursery. Almost all engage in play with others well. They are developing friendships and can share and take turns. Most children demonstrate their gross and fine motor skills well across a range of experiences, both indoors and outdoors. They can ride balancing and pedal bikes with increasing confidence and coordination. They understand simple care routines and help brush their teeth with increasing brushing skills. Most children know how they can keep safe at forest school around the fire and can name a few dangers when crossing the road. Children demonstrate their self-feeding skills and can pour from jugs and eat a wide range of foods using the correct

utensils. A few children would benefit from further opportunities to challenge their tolerances for messy play and experience wider food groups.

- Children's progress and achievements are captured effectively through a range of floorbooks, displays and personal learning journals. These illustrate well the skills children are demonstrating as they take part in a range of activities such as contributing in the community effectively and learning new skills. Practitioners' use of the newly-introduced 'achievement tree' is supporting children to talk more about the success they are having beyond nursery. They use this well to help children to see the progress they are making as they grow and develop.
- Most children are making good progress in their learning over time. Practitioners have a good understanding of the progress each child is making. Nursery tracking data, 'peedie' notes and learning stories show effectively the progress most learners are making since starting at the nursery. Senior leaders and practitioners should continue to engage in further analysis of children's attainment using the benchmarks for CfE. This will strengthen further their professional judgements as children move through early level. Senior leaders should increase how they used tracking data to identify any emerging trends or gaps in children's skills.
- Children who require additional support in their learning are making appropriate progress against individual milestones to close gaps in their learning over time. These children would benefit from working on their individual targets more frequently to help maximise their progress. New approaches to tracking have been introduced. Staff can evidence more clearly the progress children are making through breaking down targets in to more specific and measurable steps. Senior leaders and practitioners should continue to review targets and consider how they could reflect more clearly the level of support and engagement to be offered to individual children. This can provide staff with more clarity on the small developmental steps being taken by children.
- Practitioners know children and their families very well and have developed supportive relationships with them. Parents feel confident to ask for help about a range of topics should they need it. Staff signpost parents to a range of events and support materials. Practitioners work with partners to provide targeted support to families where required. This ensures that all families feel valued and understood, and able to participate in the life of 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.