

Summarised inspection findings

Shortlees Early Childhood Centre

East Ayrshire Council

21 January 2025

Key contextual information

Shortlees Early Childhood Centre (ECC) is situated within the Shortlees Primary School Campus and serves the Shortlees area of Kilmarnock, East Ayrshire. Almost all children reside in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles one and two. The centre provides placements for children aged from six weeks until starting primary school and can cater for 64 children at any one time. The current roll is 102. Most children aged two to five years can access funded early learning and childcare (ELC). All other children are allocated placements via a central allocations group. Currently, 36% of children require significant additional support with their learning. In addition, a high number of children are receiving enhanced levels of support during their session.

The centre is open from 8 am to 6 pm for 50 weeks of the year. Children have various patterns of attendance including full-days, part-days, term-time and full year placements. The centre has three playrooms and two outdoor areas.

The headteacher of the school has overall responsibility for the ECC. Staffing consists of two deputy managers, an excellence and equity lead, two senior early learning and childcare practitioners, a team of practitioners and support staff. Staff have a range of shift patterns. In the last year, the centre has experienced a range of staffing challenges.

| 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment | Satisfactory |
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| <p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ learning and engagement■ quality of interactions■ effective use of assessment■ planning, tracking and monitoring | |

Children under three

- Children benefit from the warm and caring interactions of practitioners which is helping them to settle well into the centre and feel safe and secure. Children explore their environment enthusiastically and investigate the range of experiences provided, particularly experiences with a sensory element. Practitioners have been piloting a new planning approach for the local authority. This new approach is enabling practitioners to focus clearly on children's developmental stages. In addition, it is helping practitioners plan the learning environment and adult-directed experiences. Moving forward, practitioners could consider ways to develop children's skills more naturally through a more open-ended and responsive flow to the day. In both playrooms, practitioners should continue to develop the learning spaces to create a cosier feel. This will help to increase opportunities for children to explore freely, the natural and open-ended materials.

Children aged over three years

- Relationships between practitioners and children and between children and their peers are warm and caring. Children experience a respectful ethos and culture where all children are treated and valued as individuals. Practitioners are sensitive to the varying needs of children resulting in children feeling safe. As a result, the majority of children concentrate well on their chosen activities, particularly when engaged in structured activities led by practitioners. Senior

leaders and practitioners should continue to review and develop further the playrooms, 'snug' and outdoor environments. This is to ensure practitioners maximise learning opportunities to provide open ended, challenging experiences that encourage children to develop curiosity, enquiry and creativity.

- Practitioners know children and their stage of development well. They interact with children in a positive and caring way. Senior leaders should continue to develop consistency in the quality of interactions to ensure there are sufficient levels of challenge for children. They should now work with practitioners to review the overuse of adult-led experiences. In doing so, they should work towards increasing opportunities for children to share their interests, ideas and prior knowledge through a consultative approach. This will enable children to follow their interests, make important decisions about what they want to learn, and lead their own learning more naturally.
- Practitioners make frequent observations of children's learning. The team record these observations in children's individual electronic learning journals which helps them to plan for children's next steps. Practitioners encourage parents to contribute to their child's learning journal and a few share learning from home. As children become more involved in planning their own learning, practitioners should support children to have greater ownership of their journal. This should help children to begin to recognise themselves as learners.
- Practitioners are at an early stage of introducing a new local authority early level monitoring and tracking tool. Senior leaders should continue to support practitioners to use this extensive tool in a manageable way. Practitioners are at the early stages of engaging in moderation with colleagues from other settings to help them make judgements about children's progress. Along with the monitoring and tracking tool, this has the potential to ensure a shared understanding of expectations about assessment.
- Practitioners support children well who may be facing additional challenges in their learning. Moving forward, practitioners could record, in more detail, clear individual, measurable targets and strategies for children. This should help senior leaders and practitioners monitor and evaluate children's achievements and progress over time more effectively.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

- 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.

3.2 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

Children under three

- Babies eagerly explore their environment by crawling and toddling. They spend time filling and emptying containers, rolling balls and playing with sand. They are developing their vocabulary well, by using their words to name familiar objects. Children aged two to three years, are beginning to make choices about where they would like to play and communicate their needs through their words or gestures. They investigate using their senses when exploring pasta and discovering new scents. A few children throw and catch a ball confidently. Children in both playrooms would benefit from cosier spaces where they can play and learn through the increased use of natural and open-ended resources.

Children aged over three years

- Overall, children make good progress in their learning. Children start the centre with a range of experiences, learning and skills. They have continued to make good progress in their learning relevant to their individual stage of development.
- In early communication and language, children make good progress. Most children continue to develop their talking and listening skills well. They approach adults confidently to engage in conversation or to express their needs. Children demonstrate an interest in books and talk about key events and characters in a story. The majority of children are beginning to recognise their name, and a few identify the initial sounds of their name and other familiar words. Most children engage in mark-making and a few children draw with increasing detail. Children could develop their mark-making skills further through a wider range of real-life contexts.
- Children make good progress in early numeracy and mathematics. Most children develop their counting skills well during play and adult-directed activities. A few count backwards from five and understand that zero means nothing. They are beginning to name and recognise numerals, with a few recognising quantities without touch counting. Most children explore two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects using blocks and loose part resources. The majority of children recognise simple shapes and match and sort using single criteria such as colour or shape. They use mathematical language appropriately when making comparisons about the weight and height of objects.
- Overall, children make good progress in health and wellbeing. Most children develop their gross motor skills confidently when accessing outdoor play. Children develop their fine motor skills well when manipulating playdough, using scissors, and other tools. They are developing

independence through, for example, handwashing and getting ready for outdoors. Children are beginning to talk about their emotions and express how they feel. Increasingly, children learn, share, and take turns as part of a group. Children will benefit from the continued targeted support to help them consolidate and apply these skills in different contexts.

- Practitioners use children's individual learning journals and a tracking tool to demonstrate children's progress. Senior leaders recognise, that more work is required to embed the tracking tool to demonstrate the progress all children have made over time. They should continue, as planned, to support practitioners to gain an understanding of how to use the information gathered more effectively to secure children's progress.
- Practitioners use praise and encouragement meaningfully to support children and celebrate their successes. They capture on the 'group rockets' when children demonstrate skills such as kindness, sharing and tidying. Moving forward, practitioners could extend this to include a wider range of achievements. For example, making links with the skills framework would support children to develop important life skills.
- Senior leaders and practitioners know the local community and families very well. They are very aware of the potential barriers children and families may face. Practitioners are proactive in offering support to families and signposting when necessary to community resources and support services. They make worthwhile use of 'Wonderful Wednesdays' to provide targeted support for children to develop early communication and language skills. As a result of this approach, children are progressing well in this area of their learning.

1.1 Nurturing care and support

We evaluated this key question as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children, and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Staff knew children well and were building trusting relationships with them. Interactions between practitioners and children were warm and caring, which helped children feel included. Staff spoke in a kind and respectful way, which showed children they were valued. We highlighted the importance of nurturing and respectful interactions to ensure all children feel fully included, cherished, and unique.

Children's overall wellbeing was supported. Information about them, including their personal care, dietary requirements, allergies, and medical needs, was collated. Evidence showed that these were timely reviewed and updated, meaning staff had the most up-to-date information about children. Monitoring was in place. This approach, when coupled with strategies to support how children would meet their targets set, will assist in promoting positive outcomes through the reflection of children's individual changing needs.

At lunchtime, children enjoyed the hot, nutritious meal provided by the service. Mealtimes were sociable, with children of all ages choosing to sit with their siblings or friends. Overall, there were opportunities to support children's confidence and independence, fostering life-long skills. For example, children were encouraged to use cutlery and serve food and drinks. Mealtime experiences could be further enhanced by allowing children to help tidy their plates and cutlery when finished and having staff eat with them to provide a positive role model and encourage positive eating habits.

Staff proactively sought advice from professionals to support meeting the needs of children and their families. Children benefitted from a service that valued the importance of partnership working, and good relationships had been formed with relevant external agencies. The service should continue to develop meaningful relationships with all families.

For younger children, sleep routines were tailored to their individual needs and respected the wishes of their families. Ensuring children's safety was a shared responsibility. We discussed the importance of gaining informed consent from families by sharing the NHS Safer Sleep guidance. This collective commitment will promote good sleep habits and respect the values and wishes of each family.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: good

1.3 Play and learning

We evaluated this key question as adequate, where strengths just outweighed weaknesses.

Planning for younger children's play and learning was at the early stages of embedding and was beginning to reflect their interests. Staff told us they were more confident with the observation, planning, and evaluation cycle. As a result, children were developing well and enjoyed playing with toys and materials available to them.

While most children aged three to five were engaged and having fun with the available resources, we identified a need for a more balanced approach to play and learning. For example, complementing adult-directed planning approaches with more opportunities for children to lead their own play and learning. This balance is key to supporting children and extending their creativity, curiosity, and inquiry skills, ensuring their interests are always at the heart of their play and learning.

Listening to stories, singing, and participating in group discussions enhanced children's language, literacy, and numeracy skills. Effective play opportunities in the playroom could further develop and extend these experiences, improving children's quality of activities and motivation.

Staff members' enthusiasm in their interactions with children contributed to fostering a positive learning environment. We suggested ways to enrich and extend children's play experiences, such as more effective use of questioning to extend children's thinking. We also discussed the importance of increasing attention to detail in playrooms to ensure high-quality resources and provocations are available for children to explore their ideas and imagination on their own and with their peers. These elements can significantly enrich the experiences of all children (area for improvement 1).

Children's play and learning experiences were recorded through observations and photographs. Online journals held observations for children, demonstrated a variety of planned activities, and showed how children were progressing. These informed families of their child's development and were used to plan further experiences. Further consideration should be given to ensure the pace of learning is suitable for children aged three to five.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: adequate

3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well

We evaluated this key question as adequate, where strengths just outweighed weaknesses.

The senior leadership team engaged well in the inspection process, which gave assurance that there was potential for the capacity for continued improvement in the service moving forward. This will ensure positive outcomes for children and their families.

The leadership team was committed to delivering a quality service for children and families. They shared their intentions to focus on continuing to build the staff team, improving staff's knowledge on sustained self-evaluation and building on developing parental engagement. This would promote a shared vision and culture of shared responsibility.

While quality assurance, including monitoring and auditing, was in place, our inspection identified some missed opportunities. When improved, these opportunities could significantly enhance the effectiveness of medication management, infection control, accident and incident management, risk assessments, and control measures and strategies. By ensuring that quality assurance activities are purposeful and informed by national best practices, the service can instil confidence in families about the high-quality provision for children (area for improvement 2).

We encourage the leadership team to develop an action plan to address some of the points discussed in this inspection and the areas for improvement identified. This plan should include the views, wishes, and aspirations of staff, children, and their families. This inclusive approach will ensure that plans are formed from the perspectives of those directly involved with the service, making them feel included and valued.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: adequate

During the previous Care Inspectorate inspection, the setting had no requirements and no areas for improvement. As a result of this inspection, there are no requirements and two areas for improvement.

Area for improvement

Area for improvement 1

To improve the quality of children's experiences, staff should ensure that children are meaningfully involved in leading their play and learning through a balance of planned and spontaneous experiences and resources. Children's choice should be promoted, and their learning and development extended through provocations (resources or activities that promote thoughts, creativity and learning) and skilful staff interactions.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I can choose to have an active life and participate in a range of recreational, social, creative, physical and learning activities every day, both indoors and outdoors' (HSCS 1.25).

Area for improvement 2

To support continuous improvement of the service, management should continue to develop their quality assurance processes, including monitoring and improvement planning. This should include, but is not limited to, monitoring of medication, accident/incident and risk management, infection control, play spaces and planning for children's learning.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'My environment is secure and safe' (HSCS 5.17) and 'I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes (HSCS 4.19).

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

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|-------------------------|---------------|
| 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.