

Summarised inspection findings

Seahorse Nursery

East Lothian Council

27 November 2018

Key contextual information

Seahorse Nursery is situated in the town of Cockenzie, East Lothian and can accommodate 35 children. This is split over 16 juniors, ten toddlers, six tweenies and three babies. At the time of the inspection, there was a total of 53 children on the roll. The nursery is in partnership with the local authority for funded children aged from three years to those not yet attending school.

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

- The setting has in place an established mission statement, alongside a set of aims, which were reviewed in the past year. Management and practitioners have rightly identified the need to create a new vision, values and aims that truly reflect the setting and its place in the community. Engagement with children, parents, practitioners and partners will be a key feature in the development of the new vision, values and aims.
- The recently appointed manager leads the setting well and shows a strong commitment to her role. She attends meetings organised by the local authority to share practice and update her own knowledge and skills. Practitioners engage in a range of continuing professional development opportunities within the setting, at college and those provided by the local authority. As planned, practitioners should continue to develop their own professional learning, for example, through visits and engagement with local settings. The setting benefits from ongoing support from the local authority peripatetic teacher team and Early Years Education Officer.
- Practitioners are enthusiastic and motivated to make improvements in their practice. All practitioners engaged in an audit, which allowed the manager the opportunity to identify areas where further training or support was required. This is regularly reviewed by the manager, ensuring practitioners receive the necessary support and encouragement. Regular team meetings take place and include upskilling practitioners using different approaches. Recent areas of focus include, Building the Ambition, child protection and engaging with the new health and social care standards.
- Management and practitioners co-created the setting's improvement plan. This clearly identifies appropriate priorities for improvement. A positive start to distributing leadership opportunities across the team is supporting practitioners in their professional development. There is potential to increase opportunities for all practitioners to develop their own skills in taking forward priorities from the setting's improvement plan.
- The team have made a positive start to exploring national guidance *How good is our early learning and childcare?* to support their evaluation of the setting. However, a focused approach

to in-depth self-evaluation and monitoring of practice needs to be further developed. Planned improvements should be specific, clear and measurable and ensure an appropriate pace of change in order to make a positive difference for children and families.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

satisfactory

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

- Children under three years are happy, settled and secure. They enjoy learning outdoors in the attractive nursery garden and during exciting forest and seashore experiences. We were able to see how these experiences are helping younger children develop resilience and independence well. Children aged three to five years cooperate and support each other in their learning. Ongoing improvement to learning environments provide enhanced opportunities for imaginative and creative play. As a result, children demonstrate good levels of engagement and motivation in their learning, particularly during outdoor experiences. In order to secure consistent levels of challenge and engagement to extend children's literacy and numeracy further, indoor learning experiences should now be looked at more closely.
- Practitioners encourage children to reflect on risk and how to keep themselves safe whilst challenging themselves in play. This is helping children develop their sense of themselves as responsible and capable individuals. Practitioners should now consider how to support children further to develop their early leadership skills.
- Across the setting, relationships are consistently warm and responsive. Practitioners are alert to children's individual care needs and provide sensitive, nurturing care and encouragement when needed. As planned, they should work as a team to develop their skills in using a balance of comment and questions to extend children's thinking more consistently.
- Practitioners know children well. Observations of children's responses to experiences across the curriculum are recorded in online learning journals. This is helping to share children's learning with home. Practitioners should now continue to develop ways of involving parents in contributing more fully in recognising children's achievement and considering next steps. Overall, there is considerable scope to improve the quality of observations and their use in taking children's learning forward. This will help to ensure that experiences build more consistently, on what children have learned and achieved. A manageable number of focused observations, alongside floor books, and regular learning conversations should be used to support practitioners to plan learning.
- Practitioners have identified the need to develop further, how they support children to make informed choices about their learning and have a key role in leading their own learning. The recently re-introduced use of floor books and mind maps has the potential to support practitioners in engaging children in useful conversations about learning. In doing so, practitioners should seek to support children in developing appropriate vocabulary to reflect on and evaluate their experiences and to plan how to develop their learning further.

- Tracking and monitoring across the curriculum should be improved. Moderation within and beyond the setting should be used to build a shared understanding of expectations of children's learning.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning and development pathways

- Across the setting, the curriculum is based on play. Practitioners are continuing to develop confidence in making full use of national and local guidance in planning children's learning. Senior leaders and practitioners should now revisit the national practice guidance, *Building the Ambition*, to deepen their shared understanding of high quality early learning and childcare.
- Children's health and wellbeing is a priority in the setting and practitioners provide a variety of experiences to support children's development in this area. Practitioners should now make more use of the design principles of *Curriculum for Excellence* to further support challenge and depth in children's learning across the curriculum. Senior leaders should support practitioners to develop further their understanding on early language and numeracy learning and progression
- To provide greater clarity and purpose, it will be useful for practitioners and managers to develop a clear rationale for the curriculum. This should take account of the unique context of the setting, reflecting parents' and carers' aspirations for children and up to date research in early learning. In doing so, practitioners should consider the use of personal learning planning to build effectively on the prior and continuous learning of children within and beyond the setting.
- Practitioners make effective use of the local environment to enrich learning and extend children's awareness of the world around them. Children should be supported further to make links between the skills they are developing in the setting and the types of employment and work in the local community. Practitioners are at an early stage in using digital technology to support children's learning.
- For information about transitions, please see choice QI below.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on children and families – parental engagement

- Partnership with parents is very positive and parents spoken to during the inspection process are very happy with their experience at Seahorse Nursery. Many parents have had experience of the setting over a number of years, with several returning with their younger children. Parents are very happy with the communication from nursery, which includes daily informal conversation, social media, newsletters and more formal parents' nights.
- Parents also comment positively about the introduction of online learning journals, noting that these are informative and detailed. Overall parental responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire are very positive, however a significant few would like more ideas to share learning at home and in the setting. Parents comment positively on the helpful parents' notice board, alongside the useful information leaflets, for example, outdoor learning.
- The setting has benefitted from input from parents in relation to the world of work, with visits from a police officer and dental nurse. Parents comment favourably about the flexibility of the setting in relation to shared placements with the local nursery class. Parents also report that management and practitioners are open and approachable, always willing to listen. Partnerships with local settings is developing and this will help to support moderation and engagement with other practitioners moving forward.

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. At the time of the inspection, there were no identified areas for development.

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

- Relationships across the setting are built upon mutual respect and trust, leading to a warm, welcoming and friendly ethos for all children and their families. Settling in procedures allow practitioners the opportunity to get to know their children and parents well, this supports children to develop a feeling of being safe and secure in their environment. Overall children's behaviour was observed to be positive in line with their age and stage of development. Practitioners should continue to promote positive behaviour through positive relationships.
- The principles of Getting it right for every child and the use of the wellbeing indicators are evident in practice, for example, in the 'fix it folder'. Practitioners and children should continue to develop their use of the language of the wellbeing indicators across all aspects of their work. We discussed with the nursery developing further a shared understanding of what it means to be safe, healthy, active, nurtured, achieving, responsible, respected and included. This would promote the language of wellbeing and further support the development of positive outcomes for children and families in their community.
- Children are developing friendships and are confident and happy in their environment. A range of resources, indoors and outdoors, supports children's curiosity and inquiry as they explore loose parts, both large and small. Outdoor learning opportunities encourage children to be healthy and active. Practitioners support children to develop a healthy sense of risk and challenge themselves appropriately outdoors. This is evident in the garden, at the beach and on the outings to the local woodland. It is important that practitioners continue to risk assess certain aspects of children's play, for example, at the beach.
- Children have a healthy snack in the setting and take responsibility for serving themselves. The setting benefit from having a cook on the premises, ensuring food is prepared and served appropriately. Children's involvement in menu planning with the cook would offer further opportunities for them to develop their leadership skills. There is a well-established lunch routine and children engage in a positive lunchtime experience with their peers. They are developing their personal hygiene skills, for example, washing their hands before snack.
- There is a clear understanding of what is required of practitioners and management in their requirement to fulfil statutory duties to secure positive outcomes for children. Practitioners display a sensitive and caring manner when responding to children's individual needs. Children who face barriers to their learning have individual plans put in place in consultation with families and other agencies where appropriate. The senior leader understands how to access appropriate support when required.

- Equality and diversity is celebrated and valued, with all children and families treated with respect in a fair and just manner. The team should continue to explore how they can engage children and parents in relevant and meaningful learning about diversity and equality. As planned, the setting should review existing resources including books.

3.2 Securing children's progress

satisfactory

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

- The focus on health and wellbeing across the setting has a positive impact on children's learning and development. Babies and toddlers are encouraged to investigate and make choices beyond the familiar spaces of their playrooms. Nurturing relationships mean that they are able to do so with increasing assurance. Children aged three to five are developing their social and emotional skills well. Outdoor adventures and extended experiences of play in the well-designed nursery garden help children develop confidence and good self-regulation skills.
- Children are making satisfactory progress in early language. They listen well and enjoy sharing stories from an early age. Children have favourite story books which they enjoy revisiting. Songs and rhymes support children in developing their awareness of the sounds and patterns in spoken language. Practitioners should consider developing further this aspect of the work of the setting to extend children skills. Children are beginning to learn about the usefulness of non-fiction texts, for example, to identify birds and flowers. Children are encouraged to explore a range of writing tools. They are beginning to write their own names and learning about the letters of the alphabet through experiences in the art area.
- In early numeracy and mathematics, children have opportunities to count in the contexts of daily routines and play. They are learning about shape, colour, matching and sorting through interesting real life experiences that encourage them to take a closer look at the world around them. Children are beginning to develop their understanding of measure by making comparisons at work, in the forests and when using a hoist to lift heavier weights.
- Children are making good progress in health and wellbeing. They have formed positive friendships and are confident in accessing all areas of the setting. Children are learning about making healthy choices through conversations at meal times and snacks. They explain the importance of good hand hygiene practices before eating when out on an adventure. Children are developing gross motor skills through energetic physical play outdoors.
- As the use of assessment, tracking and monitoring improves, practitioners should be supported to plan experiences that are more challenging across early learning. This will enable children to extend their early literacy and mathematical skills further in play and real life experiences, and ensure best possible progress for all children. Focused continuing professional development

and strengthened shared leadership, including leadership of learning, will be key to securing further improvement to experiences and outcomes for children.

- Parents value the information about their children's learning provided through online journals and social media platforms. Senior leaders understand the need to celebrate and build on children's wider achievements more effectively. We discussed how the staff team might usefully explore ways to encourage parents as active partners in recognising achievements and planning children's learning journeys.
- Practitioners know families and the local community well. They take steps to identify potential barriers to progress and work to provide valued support to children and families. They should continue to develop partnerships to enhance capacity in this aspect of their practice.

Setting choice of QI : 2.6 Transitions

- Quality of support for children and their families
- Collaborative planning and delivery
- Continuity and progression in learning

- Settling in procedures ensure children and families have a smooth transition into and across the nursery setting. 'All about me' forms capture key information when children start the setting and as they move from room to room. Planned opportunities to have a coffee and chat with parents at the point of transition will allow time for sharing key information and introducing new key workers.
- Parents report that the team are responsive to their individual needs and offer a great deal of flexibility within the setting. Several children attend for 'wrap around care', spending part of their day at the local nursery class. Practitioners transport children between settings, helpfully having informal discussions with colleagues about a child's day. Building on this positive start, practitioners should continue to explore partnership work with other settings to support continuity of learning and appropriate sharing of information for children who experience a split placement.
- Transitions are developing, with the manager making a positive start to engaging with the local primary schools. Parents have the opportunity to view and inform transition reports for their individual child. Transition timetables from receiving schools, allow the setting to plan for each child to attend on specific days. Practitioners support parents to engage in the transition process by taking children along to participate in certain aspects of the transition programme. There is scope, working with local schools and the local authority to support the development of transitions across the early level. This should have an emphasis on continuity and progression in learning and build on successful pastoral transition.

1. Quality of care and support

Children and parents were welcomed into the nursery by staff who knew them well. Staff were kind and caring in their interactions, which helped children to feel safe and nurtured.

Children were sociable and curious. Many were eager to chat to us about the things they enjoyed and to ask us questions about our visit. Staff were developing their use of responsive planning which helped ensure children's ideas were represented in the activities they took part in. Seeing their ideas and interests reflected in the playrooms increased children's sense of belonging and of contributing to their nursery.

Most staff were confident in describing the needs and interests of individual children in their care. They were skilled in listening to and talking to children. They understood the importance of giving children time to think things through and respond. We asked the manager to think about how she could make best use of staff skills to provide structured support to less experienced and confident staff. Promoting play in a consistent child focused way across the service would result in positive consistent outcomes for all children.

Meal times were a social occasion for children as they sat together supported by staff who encouraged social skills and conversation. Children had some opportunities to develop independence and make choices for themselves because they did serve some of their own food. We discussed how this could be improved further, for example, giving children smaller jugs making drinks easier to pour. Replacing plastic cups and plates with more real life items would make the eating experience more pleasant.

The service was in the process of reviewing the medication policy. We made some suggestions, which would help ensure that the revised procedures were in line with the best practice document 'Management of Medication in Day Care of Children and Childminding Settings'. The manager took action on these areas at the point of discussion.

We looked at a sample of children's learning stories. In some examples, we saw the same observations repeated over time. We asked the service to consider how they could ensure that the information recorded in children's learning stories was consistent, supportive and identified clear next steps supporting children's development.

Care Inspectorate grade: Good

2. Quality of environment

Children were cared for in a safe and secure environment that benefited from an ongoing cycle of refurbishment. Bright well laid out playrooms allowed children to move around freely making their own choices from the resources and activities available without adult support. Staff had introduced loose parts and natural materials into the playrooms, which supported imaginative and creative play. We discussed the potential for this to be developed further especially in areas like the home corners where much imaginative play took place. We talked to the manager about how they could continue to develop the indoor activities generally in order to ensure they provided challenge for all children.

Children's toilets on the lower ground floor of the nursery leading to the garden were in need of refurbishment. Although there were doors on the cubicles, they opened into the corridor and the area was draughty and uninviting. The provider accepted our findings and agreed to move forward with this.

The nursery garden was used well providing children with an exciting and challenging space for active and creative play. Children had fun in the mud kitchen, they challenged themselves on rope swings, climbed in trees and learned to cooperate as they built structures from loose parts. Quiet sheltered areas allowed children to spend time reflecting, reading and enjoying being in a natural environment. The layout of the building meant free flow play was restricted. We asked the manager to consider how children could be given more choice in when they accessed the garden. The manager told us she was aware of this and had ongoing discussions about how it might be achieved.

Regular half day visits to the beach and nearby woodland gave children opportunities to experience long periods of freedom and challenge in their play. Risk assessments and safety checks had been established for these experiences, they included talking to children about how they managed potential risks in the environment. In order to ensure children's safety we emphasised the need for staff to constantly reassess risk assessments taking account of knowledge of children, staffing numbers and changing weather conditions in the woodlands and beach.

Care Inspectorate grade: Good

3. Quality of staffing

The staff team worked well together showing commitment to ensuring that children's needs were met in a fun and nurturing environment. We could see that children had developed close and trusting relationship with staff looking to them for comfort support and reassurance.

Staff were qualified or in training for the posts they held in the service. They benefited from a rolling programme of training provided by the service, which ensured they remained up to date with training in child protection, food hygiene and first aid. Senior staff had attended training in areas including Building the Ambition, How good is our early learning and childcare? and Curriculum for Excellence. Information from these courses was cascaded down to staff through in house presentations and detailed quizzes were used to check staff's understanding. We discussed the benefits of individual staff being able to attend external training courses. This

would promote their professional development and allow them to engage in professional discussion with other practitioners from other early years services.

In discussion with a sample of staff, we found they understood their responsibility for keeping children safe and were clear about the course of action they must take in the event of any concerns.

Staff told us they felt well supported by the manager. Annual appraisals and individual one-to-one support and supervision meetings gave staff the opportunity to discuss areas including their caseloads and training needs. Staff were responsible for contributing to the agenda for discussion supporting them to inform improvement. Meetings were recorded and signed by the manager and staff. This helped to ensure that agreed actions were monitored and accountability shared.

We spoke to the most recently recruited staff. They confirmed that they had taken part in a structured induction, which helped prepare them for their role in the service.

Staff told us the manager recognised and rewarded ambition. We spoke to a member of the senior team with a particular interest in outdoor play who had been given responsibility for developing the services policy and leading the outdoor learning opportunities.

Care Inspectorate grade: Good

4. Quality of management and leadership

The new manager was committed to her professional development. She was currently studying for her Professional Development Award (PDA) level 9 and intended to go on to study for her BA in Early Childhood Education.

The manager had a vision for the future development of the service. In her first year as manager, she set out areas for improvement in the service's development plan with the involvement of staff. These areas were reviewed regularly in order to ensure they were on track to be met. She intends to extend this in the future by encouraging parents and children to become involved. Parents we spoke to during the inspection told us the manager kept them well informed about events in the service, she encouraged their views and was open to ideas.

The manager described how she audited the service by spending time in the playrooms. She looked at areas including quality of resources, staff interaction with children and record keeping. Weekly meetings were held with the senior management team in order to ensure effective communication and that any concerns are taken forward appropriately. We suggested that keeping a formal record of these visits and meetings would support the manager in moving forward with identified improvements and with progress in any of the areas for improvement identified in this report.

The manager described how she used the Care Inspectorate Hub as a way of keeping up to date with changes in policy and procedure and for examples of best practice.

As part of their partnership agreement with East Lothian Council, the service received regular support visits from one of their early years teaching staff. The manager told us she valued these visits as a way of keeping up to date with best practice.

Care Inspectorate grade: Good

Explanation of terms of quality

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quality 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.