

Summarised inspection findings

Applecross Primary School Nursery Class

The Highland Council

9 June 2020

Key contextual information

Applecross Primary School Nursery Class is situated within the village of Applecross. The children have access to an indoor space but spend a significant majority of their time outside in their extensive and varied grounds. The recent addition of a covered area offers shelter from the weather. Given the harshness of the location this shelter provides a versatile space to play. Children attend the nursery from the age of three until starting school. The current roll is four. The nursery is registered for 6 children at any one time. A number of children are accessing the extended hours provision.

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 headteacher has been in post for around two years. Since taking up his post he has worked with practitioners, children, parents and the local community to create a more relevant vision, values and aims statement for the nursery. The vision reflects the strong focus placed on building positive relationships, mutual trust and respect. The values of perseverance, self-control, thoughtfulness, honesty and friendship are evident in most of the daily interactions between children and between children and practitioners. Children are actively involved within a supportive and nurturing ethos to improve their outdoor learning spaces. As a result, they are gaining confidence in sharing their own thoughts about what will improve their play spaces.
- Practitioners are effective leaders of change. They engage enthusiastically in a range of professional learning opportunities, often undertaken outwith their contractual hours. These opportunities are deepening their knowledge of child-centred pedagogy. Practitioners know which aspects of their provision are working well. They are becoming increasingly reflective about their practice. Practitioners are aware of national guidance and have had some experience of using quality indicators to informally evaluate the quality of provision. However, there is limited time set aside in their working week to meet together or with senior staff to formally evaluate the quality of provision. Practitioners and senior staff now need to take a closer look at the quality of the indoor environment to ensure children have a consistency of experience both outdoors and indoors. To achieve this the headteacher needs to take a more strategic role in leading change through effective self-evaluation.
- Practitioners value the occasional opportunities they have to collaborate with staff in the primary class to plan children's learning across the early level. They now need more regular opportunities for planning and for nursery and early primary aged children to learn together, to build on the effective outdoor play experiences in the nursery class.
- Practitioners actively promote parental and community involvement in the life and work of the nursery. They welcome the many offers of support they receive from parents and others to improve the work of the nursery. Parents and community members share their gardening and shed building skills as part of the development of an outdoor nursery. The whole school trip to

Eigg helped to enhance children’s citizenship and teamwork skills, and extended their knowledge of the wider world.

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's learning outdoors is good. Children are relaxed, happy and almost all of the time purposefully engaged in activities they choose for themselves in the extensive outdoor spaces. They have time to explore, to investigate and to be creative in their stimulating natural surroundings. As they explored the possibilities afforded by the lobster creel they took part in highly imaginative conversations about being fishermen. They gather eggs daily from their hens and marvel at the size, and count accurately how many eggs are laid, before expertly ushering the hens back into their wooden house.
- Children's play outdoors is sustained for long periods of time. Outside, they focus on activities such as measuring the distance from the cable drum to the fence posts. During this activity they work as a cohesive team, each with a defined role; as the director, as a measurer and the reader of the numbers on the measuring tape. They are knowledgeable about the weather, offering a forecast of an impending snow shower coming across the bay from Raasay. Indoors, they can follow a pictorial recipe to make coloured dough. When kneading and rolling the dough they are learning to use early mathematical language appropriately. Practitioners provide the right level of challenge and support to children as they measure out the ingredients. An early review of the layout and resources of the playroom is needed. Currently, the playroom is very cluttered. This is impacting negatively on the quality of their learning indoors.
- Children are supported by effective practitioners. Overall, their high quality interactions ensure children have time to think, to be creative and to be curious. Practitioners adopt a solution focussed approach, intervening early to avoid potential areas for conflict. They help children to resolve situations for themselves using well-judged dialogue and interactions.
- Children's profiles have recently changed to a digital profile which parents can access and comment on remotely. The profiles contain photographs of children's day to day experiences and achievements in the nursery environment and community. The profiles are also used by practitioners to track how well children are progressing in areas of the curriculum. The profiles form the basis of termly discussions with senior staff and practitioners. The effectiveness of the digital profiles has not been tested. Children's and parents' views need to be taken into account when evaluating their relevance. Some form of interactive profile or learning journal that is more child friendly should be considered. In this way, children can have ownership of their own learning through meaningful conversations with parents and practitioners.
- The use of digital technologies is a focus on the whole school improvement plan. Practitioners make regular use of tablet computers to capture children's achievements. Children enjoy seeing these moments. Children did not access digital technology during the inspection visit.
- Practitioners adopt a planning in the moment approach in response to children's interests. This approach has advantages in that it is responsive to children's immediate needs and

motivations. Practitioners also plan some specific activities which build on and extend for example, children's literacy and numeracy skills. Arrangements for assessing children's progress are mostly informal. The digital profiles provide a record of what children can do. Practitioners and senior staff now need to improve and formalise assessment arrangements. They need to join up the cycle of planning, tracking, assessing and recording progress to ensure they consistently meet the needs of all children.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning and developmental pathways

- The child-centred curriculum aligns well with the principles of the early level of Curriculum for Excellence. It reflects positively the nursery's intention to become a full time outdoor early learning and childcare setting. Children access a polycrub construction which offers shelter and a space for children to take part in a range of activities. These include mark making and singing games. Children have flexible access to this space for activities they choose for themselves or those planned by the practitioners. The curriculum echoes the nursery's vision and values. In particular, 'perseverance' which is evident in children's growing resilience as they play outdoors in all weathers. Practitioners are very good at supporting the wellbeing needs of children.
- The children spend most of their time outdoors where they are gaining a deep knowledge and relevant understanding of the world around them. The curriculum is generally broad. It is flexible and responsive to the interests and motivations of the children. Practitioners plan exciting activities outdoors which support the needs of the current cohort of children. Practitioners need to consider in the longer term if the breadth and balance across curriculum areas will meet the needs of a more diverse group of children in the future. Children's language and communication skills will be further enhanced by planning for a stronger focus on literacy experiences and outcomes across the early level.
- Practitioners manage the transitions from outdoors to indoors reasonably well. They need to consider the challenges faced by a few children as they adjust to the confines of a smaller indoor space. A review of the layout and appropriateness of resources on offer inside would help to address this issue. Practitioners should continue to replace plastic furniture and resources with more natural materials.
- Children starting nursery and school benefit from the nurturing ethos successfully created by practitioners. Parents are welcomed into the nursery and encouraged to be involved in transition activities. They value their varied involvement with the nursery throughout the year and not just at times of key transitions. Practitioners make very good use of the talents and skills of parents, carers and community partners to add value to children's curriculum experiences.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on children and families – parental engagement

- Practitioners work closely with a range of community partners. This includes support from local businesses as well as reaping the benefits of tapping into the skills of parents and grandparents. The children enjoy regular visits to the library bus which has a wealth of resources on offer. Children often visit local shops, galleries and places of interest. They walk once a week to the village hall for physical education. Practitioners keep parents well informed. They do so informally through face to face meetings, and a variety of planned parental engagement events. The children benefit from specialist inputs from those with skills in forestry, fishing and arts and crafts.

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 settle very quickly and comfortably into their outdoor learning environment. They are at their happiest when engaging with the wide variety of stimulating play spaces on offer outside. These exciting spaces offer children challenge and endless opportunities to experience for example, loose parts play, science, and risky play. Relationships are mostly positive between the children. A few children are still learning to play cooperatively. The sensitive nurturing approaches used by the practitioners are helping children to feel safe and included.
- Practitioners know the children very well and almost always provide the right level of support for those who are still managing their emotions and developing social skills. Children's views are respected and they are meaningfully included in decision-making activities. Practitioners act upon children's ideas such as the placement of tree saplings. With support children planted the saplings and learned how to keep the trees safe from predators. Practitioners took the opportunity that this planting activity provided, to talk to children about what they need to keep themselves safe. As a result, children have a good awareness of what it means to be safe and healthy. Practitioners need to continue to support a few children to have a deeper understanding of what it means to achieve and to be consistently respectful of each other.
- The nursery staffing ratios mean that practitioners often have sole responsibility for the group of nursery children while outdoors. While this situation is in line with authority staffing ratios it does place additional pressures on practitioners to safely lead and manage children's learning. This is particularly noticeable when children are in the extensive outdoor spaces. Senior leaders need to explore a more flexible staffing model. This will allow for more staff to work together to plan for and support children's wellbeing. The implications of the extended provision have yet to be explored in full by senior leaders and practitioners as part of an evaluation of children's wellbeing, equality and inclusion.
- All children have a personal plan and these reviewed every six months in line with legislation. Practitioners are mindful of the needs of individual children and they work proactively to ensure that children who have additional support needs receive timely interventions. Health partners work with the school to promote healthy attitudes. Agencies are invited as required to provide inputs on keeping safe.
- Practitioners treat children and families with the greatest respect. Parents and practitioners have developed a strong mutual partnership which is built solidly on fairness, trust and kindness. The nursery actively embraces difference by involving children in developmentally appropriate discussions and activities. The nursery and school gained national recognition for its ways of effectively sustaining and reusing its resources in environmentally friendly ways.

- Practitioners' records of children's progress are now maintained using a digital profile. The arrangements for observing children's learning are not well enough developed. Practitioners do not all have a consistent knowledge of national guidance. It will be important for the staff team to have a consistent knowledge of Curriculum for Excellence early level if a secure statement of children's progress is to be made. Practitioners need to develop their skills in tracking and monitoring to demonstrate children's progress in learning over time. They should begin to gather and analyse data that enables them to measure the impact of strategies and interventions. This will support practitioners to evaluate more effectively children's progress and development.

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 are making good progress in communication and early language. Most talk confidently and express ideas and thoughts articulately. The majority listen well to stories and follow simple instructions accurately. Most engage purposefully in mark making activities. They are beginning to draw recognisable pictures. They are just starting to have a go at writing their name. Practitioners should continue to develop resources and activities to support further children's listening skills. Children join in enthusiastically with singing games and rhymes in Gaelic during the nursery session.
- Most children are making good progress in numeracy and mathematics. Almost all know the number sequence to 10 with a few counting confidently beyond ten. They recognise numerals to 10. Most children count objects accurately and are beginning to sequence numerals correctly. Most children recognise and name common two dimensional shapes. They are learning about the properties of three dimensional objects as they construct willow models. Most children use very confidently a range of vocabulary to describe measurement and size. They are developing an awareness of money through real life experiences. They sell eggs to the community and are aware of how much it costs to buy six eggs. Practitioners regularly support children to develop information handling skills and an awareness of pattern in real-life contexts.
- Almost all children are making good progress in health and wellbeing. Practitioners provide healthy snacks and a hot drink for children when playing outside. Most children have a good awareness of healthy eating. Children understand the importance of handwashing. They are particularly knowledgeable about the importance of washing their hands after collecting eggs from the hens. They are aware of safety rules when using tools such as saws, and when building fires outdoors. Most children, demonstrate high levels of independence in their own care routines. They are confident movers as they navigate the terrain in the outdoor spaces, climbing the hill and running along the heather clad paths. They manage very well their own risky play. Practitioners are conscientious about checking in frequently with children to gauge how they are feeling. Children talk about their feelings, and they are increasingly aware of the need to be kind to each other.
- Most children are making good progress in learning across the curriculum. They are learning about caring for the environment, growing fruit trees and conserving and reusing items. They

used wooden pallets to build dens and a shelter for the composting toilet. Children experiment and explore a host of natural materials to create land art.

- Practitioners celebrate children's achievements at every opportunity. Practitioners display children's work, and they share it daily with parents. They use appropriate praise such as a well done or a cuddle to recognise when children are successful. Children's achievements at home and participation in the community are also recognised. Practitioners now need to use the information they gather about children's achievements to help them plan future learning experiences.
- Practitioners are fully aware of children's socio-economic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. They actively promote the multi-cultural profile of the school community.

Practice worth sharing more widely

Outdoor learning pedagogy and practice.

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.