

Summarised inspection findings

Strichen School Nursery

Aberdeenshire Council

2 September 2025

Key contextual information

Strichen School Nursery is part of Strichen Primary School and provides early learning and childcare (ELC) in the Strichen area. The nursery is registered for 24 children at any one time. It caters for children aged three to those not yet attending school. There are currently 24 children on the roll. Children attend between 8.55a.m. and 2.55p.m. The nursery operates during term time. The early years senior practitioner (EYSP) has overall responsibility for the nursery. She is supported by the headteacher (HT) and two part time early years leads (EYL). Further staffing includes one full time and one part-time practitioner.

The nursery was refurbished in 2019. This included the addition of a shelter and the outside space being extended. There is direct access to the outdoor area. Children make use of the school hall for lunches.

1.3 Leadership of change	good
<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ 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 refreshed their vision, values and aims in 2022 in collaboration with stakeholders. Practitioners ensure that the values are developmentally appropriate for all children. They bring the values to life through their positive ethos and with frequent reference to the aims throughout the day. Practitioners have introduced animals to represent each aim, for example, 'achieving alligators'. A majority of children use this language in daily conversations with their friends. Practitioners identify the positive impact this work is having, for example, children linking the aims more confidently to their everyday experiences and learning.
- The EYSP, supported by the headteacher provides effective strategic leadership. Senior leaders guide and support practitioners well to undertake leadership roles relating to the development needs of the setting, for example, embedding the use of signing. There is scope to develop these roles further to ensure that the depth and quality of this work leads to ongoing improvement. Children across the nursery demonstrate their leadership skills in a few real-life activities, including being snack and lunch helpers and by risk assessing the outdoor area.
- Senior leaders use a detailed quality assurance calendar to ensure that all areas of the nursery are reviewed continually. Practitioners are motivated and keen to improve the setting. They use a range of helpful audits and self-evaluation activities to reach conclusions about what is working well and the aspects that need to improve. A recent example includes improving the quality of the indoor environment. They use this information to develop their improvement plan. Moving forward senior leaders should consider streamlining approaches to quality assurance and improvement planning. This should help provide staff with clearer information about the impact of their work on outcomes for children's learning.
- Practitioners value the importance of professional learning to continually enhance their knowledge and skills. Most recently training on the planning cycle has significantly informed

and influenced practice. Practitioners have developed their use of provocations which has impacted positively on engagement of children in their learning. Practitioners have been involved in collaborative learning outwith their own nursery by visiting neighbouring settings to observe the lunch routines. This has supported the positive development of the lunchtime experience.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

good

This indicator focuses on ensuring high quality learning experience for young children. It highlights the importance of a very good understanding of child development and early learning pedagogy. Effective use is made of observation to inform future learning and identify the progress made. Children are involved in planning for their own learning. Together these ensure children's successes and achievements are maximised. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of interactions
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- Practitioners have built positive, nurturing relationships with children across the setting, creating a caring ethos. They give children time, space and support that is appropriate to their stages of development and individual interests. They work well as a team and demonstrate a shared commitment to providing a range of quality experiences for children. These are well documented through photographic floorbooks. As planned, practitioners should now build on this positive start to develop further, the learning environment.
- Most children are motivated and engage well in their play activities. They are interested in new learning, and they frequently ask questions to deepen their understanding. Children have access to a range of technologies which are developing their digital literacy skills well. They research their interests, use the interactive board and problem solve using programmable toys. Almost all children explore and investigate their environments. Their engagement is best in the outdoor spaces where they lead their own learning. Building on this responsive approach, staff should ensure opportunities for children to follow their own interests, particularly indoors. This should include practitioners maximising children's time to be involved in their play and learning, particularly at the end of nursery sessions. This will help provide a seamless, positive and calm transition for all children.
- Practitioners display a good understanding of children's needs. Their interactions with children are patient and encouraging. Most practitioners use commentary and questioning effectively to support children to explore their ideas further and increase challenge. They listen to children and respond appropriately, offering explanations to deepen their learning.
- Senior leaders and practitioners have worked to develop their approaches to planning children's learning. Planning includes a yearly overview, a three-weekly intentional plan and ongoing, responsive floorbooks. They involve children well during the planning processes and use their ideas and interests as the starting point for future learning. Practitioners make regular observations of children's significant learning and record these using online learning profiles and floorbooks. They use this information to respond effectively to children's needs and plan interventions to address any gaps in development. As planned practitioners should continue the work started to ensure that the quality and frequency of observations is consistent across the setting.
- Senior leaders and practitioners meet weekly to discuss children's progress. These focused discussions ensure that children are well supported to make good progress. Practitioners use helpful progression frameworks to track children's learning and identify gaps. These provide valuable information about how children are progressing in their learning within early language and communication, mathematics and wellbeing. Practitioners use this information to identify any potential gaps and interventions required. They provide appropriate targeted interventions

through a small group focus, for example, learning about money. Staff should now develop more robust systems and processes to track the impact of interventions including those across other areas of the curriculum.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning and developmental pathways

- Practitioners provide a play-based curriculum which takes effective account of children's ideas and interests which staff develop through interesting experiences. Practitioners have a sound understanding of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and ensure that children benefit from a broad range of motivating learning experiences. They should continue to keep the flow of the day under review to ensure that time for children to be curious in their play is maximised.
- Practitioners use the local community and a range of visitors to enrich the curriculum. Children have regular access to a 'secret garden' within the school grounds where they explore and problem solve. Practitioners make use of the local community to support children's experiences. This includes visits to the local sheltered housing and community woodland.
- Senior leaders and practitioners plan effectively for transitions from home to nursery and from nursery into P1. A range of supports are in place to ensure children and families experience a positive transition from home, including the offer of a home visit. There is a comprehensive transition programme in place to support children to move on to school, this includes, learning with their P6 buddies. 'Buc' the bear is a mascot used as a transitional support to engage children in learning experiences within the P1 environment. 'Buc learning packs' provide activities for children to complete with their families at home. Online supports and resources enhance these home learning experiences for children including recordings of stories read by the P1 teacher.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on children and families – parental engagement

- Parents are actively involved in the life and work of the nursery. They attend 'share the learning' and 'stay and play' sessions. Practitioners build on this by inviting parents into the setting to share their skills and interests. As a result, most parents feel comfortable approaching the setting with questions and suggestions.
- Practitioners prioritise purposeful, unhurried interactions with parents and children at the start of the day. They provide regular information about learning through an online platform. Parents also use the online platform to share information about achievement and learning at home. Consequently, most parents have a clear understanding of their child's next steps in learning.
- Parents receive a 'parental contributions' communication every three weeks through the online platform. Practitioners share suggestions of how parents could support their child's learning in literacy, numeracy and wellbeing at home and is linked to the planning. Children choose a book each week from the lending library to take home to further support learning beyond the setting. The EYSP leads parental workshops to support parental understanding of their child's learning journey. Most recently this has included workshops on CfE and Literacy.

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

- Practitioners have created warm, supportive and nurturing relationships throughout the setting. They understand the importance of children's emotional wellbeing and this is at the centre of their work. A range of developmentally appropriate interventions are used to support children to be able to identify and understand their emotions. These include stories with a focus on emotions and self-registration using personalised painted pebbles. Practitioners know their families well and take time to build positive, caring relationships with parents and carers. Children are happy and settled as they learn to share, take turns and negotiate with their friends. If children are upset, practitioners intervene calmly and sensitively to support them.
- The majority of children recognise and name different emotions they experience. Practitioners have introduced signing to support children to understand the emotions of happy, sad, frightened and angry. They use the national wellbeing indicators to support the life and work of the setting. Practitioners have introduced wellbeing indicator animals to support children's understanding of wellbeing in a developmentally appropriate way. Most children are able to talk about some of the indicators as they play. Children understand how to be safe and healthy through real-life experiences. They keep themselves safe at the woodwork bench and carry out risk assessments in their outdoor spaces. Moving forward, practitioners should support children to have an understanding of their rights in a developmentally appropriate way.
- Children participate in a positive, calm lunch experience. Practitioners sit with children and engage children in social conversations. Children are becoming increasingly independent as they set up for lunch, serve their own food and pour their milk and water.
- All practitioners know their statutory duties and keep up to date with guidance and advice. They understand their responsibilities to keep children safe and ensure that their wellbeing needs are met. They work well with families and a range of agencies to support children's health, care and wellbeing needs. Children's personal plans are developed in consultation with parents and are reviewed at regular intervals throughout the year. Practitioners sensitively identify when children may require more targeted support to secure progress in learning and ensure this is planned for. They seek out learning they require and ensure they have the skills to offer the right support to children when they need this. For example, practitioners have engaged in training to support children's emotional and mental wellbeing. As a result, children's learning, social and emotional needs are better met.
- Practitioners provide an inclusive, nurturing and welcoming ethos that supports children to achieve. Practitioners celebrate diversity through cultural festivals. Practitioners should continue to build on this practice, for example, they could use a greater variety of books and resources to enhance children's understanding of race, religion, beliefs and disability.

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. They are confident communicators who initiate conversations readily with their friends and adults. A majority of children approach staff to ask questions and deepen their understanding. Most children learn new and interesting vocabulary through a 'key words' approach. Children enjoy listening to stories and most children can re-tell familiar stories by sequencing key events accurately. A majority of children talk confidently about authors and illustrators and a few children can talk about how the characters in the story may feel. Most children mark make during their play. They enjoy writing lists and drawing plans. Children would benefit from further opportunities to mark make indoors and in their outside space. This should lead to accelerated progress in early writing.
- Most children are making good progress in numeracy and mathematics. They recognise and use numbers within 10 confidently in their play and routines. A few children enjoy the challenge of exploring larger numbers and simple addition. A majority of children use appropriate mathematical language meaningfully to talk about and compare sizes, for example, when harvesting their broad beans. Almost all children have an understanding of money and use this in their role play shop. A majority of children understand that different coins have a different value. Almost all children can talk about the properties of two-dimensional shapes. Within their play, children are now ready to identify and explore three-dimensional objects.
- Children's progress in health and wellbeing is good. Most children are happy and confident in their environment. They are developing friendships and are able to negotiate with each other. Children make healthy food choices. They have an understanding of how exercise affects their bodies, for example, their heart beats faster. Almost all children manage risk well as they run, jump, balance and climb in their outdoor spaces. Further opportunities to develop independence should now be considered, for example, further labelling of resources to support children to self-select resources and tidy up.
- Children's achievements from within the setting are recorded using online learning journals and on the achievements display. Practitioners encourage parents to share achievements from home and these are celebrated within the setting, for example, on the achievements board. They now need to identify and track the skills children develop through these achievements.
- As a result of their nursery experiences, most children are making good progress over time. Practitioners use a range of approaches to support all children to make the best possible

progress in literacy, numeracy and wellbeing. Senior leaders should work with practitioners to ensure that children make progress over time in all areas of the curriculum.

- The nursery team take positive steps to ensure equity for all. Families are welcomed and involved in the ongoing life of the setting through a range of opportunities throughout the year, for example, coffee mornings and shared learning days. Staff are aware of children's socio-economic circumstances and take sensitive steps to address this. Children who require additional support with their learning have clear plans in place which identify strategies.

1.1 Nurturing care and support

Children benefitted from caring and warm interactions from staff which promoted their confidence and self-esteem. Staff knew children well and had built relationships with their families. This enabled them to talk with children about their home lives and experiences, supporting them to feel valued.

Children were given time to develop independence in self-care tasks such as putting on outdoor clothes. If children needed support during personal care this was given discreetly to support their privacy and dignity.

Children enjoyed snack and meal times which were relaxed, unhurried and sociable experiences. Staff sat with the children and focused on them, supporting discussions and offering support when necessary. Children had opportunities to participate in the planning and preparation of snack and served their own lunch. These experiences supported peer relationships, independence and ability to express preferences.

Personal plans were in place for children and contained information to support staff in promoting their health and wellbeing. These were supplemented by support plans where specific needs had been agreed with parents. This enabled staff to offer consistent approaches to supporting the children. However, at times the most relevant information was not clear. For example, it was not always clear when information had been updated. Work should be carried out to ensure that staff can easily access the most relevant information within children's plans.

Effective information sharing with parents supported a continuity of care for children. Regular opportunities for this included verbal exchanges at handover times, newsletters and online observations. These were augmented by termly events such as stay and play sessions and coffee mornings.

Children's health was supported by procedures in place for the safe storage and administration of medication. In one case we sampled there was not enough detail about medication the child received at home. This was rectified when we raised it with the manager and processes have now been updated.

To promote positive outcomes through a consistent approach the manager and staff were making links with other agencies involved in children's care. This included communication with health visitors, speech and language therapists and attendance at multi agency meetings.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: good

1.3 Play and learning

Children were relaxed and enjoying their time in nursery. They participated in planned and spontaneous play opportunities. Planned play was based on children's interests and curiosities as well as identified learning needs.

Generally children were able to lead their own play choosing where and how to play. Routines and planned activities limited these opportunities on occasions. Transitions times between some activities and routine such as going to lunch caused a dip in children's engagement. We asked

that staff review children's experiences at these times and consider where time spent waiting could be minimised.

Children had opportunities to develop skills in literacy language and numeracy throughout the nursery experiences. This included activities such as reading, mark making, discussions with staff and singing. During the inspection children were enjoying making clocks with a variety of resources including the woodwork bench.

Children were benefitting from strong connections to the community. They accessed local amenities such as play spaces, wooded areas and shops. They had also visited the local sheltered housing complex and, when opening times permitted, the library. This supported children to feel confident and included in their local community. Parents were invited to share their skills with the children through nursery visits, extending children's experiences and supporting parental involvement in their child's play and learning.

Skilled interactions from staff supported children to consider and express themselves. Questions such as what if, and do you think, were used to encourage children to problem solve and investigate. However, there were a few opportunities for these interactions that were missed. This was generally at times when staff appeared busy such as at the end of the day or beginning of transitions.

Staff recorded observations of children's experiences and these were shared with parents via an online system. This supported parents to be involved in their child's learning and celebrate successes and achievements. This had been identified as an area for development within the service improvement plan. Work should continue to improve the quality and regularity of these observations. This will mean that they effectively reflect children's learning and identify goals to support progression.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: good

2.2 Children experience high quality facilities

The setting was comfortable and furnished to a good standard. It was welcoming with plenty of natural light and ventilation, supporting children's health and wellbeing. Soft furnishings were used to promote some homely areas. Photos of children's family and displays of their artwork promoted their confidence and sense of belonging. There was ample space for children's play and dedicated areas to store their personal belongings, supporting them to feel respected.

The indoor and outdoor areas were structured to take account of children's interests alongside routine provision, such as sand and water play. This promoted children's participation in the activities. Children were safe as resources were appropriate to their stage of development. Children's choice and ability to follow their interests were supported as they could access most resources independently. However, in some areas of the room there were too many resources which limited the space available for children to use them. Staff should ensure that spaces are not overcrowded and support children's individual play experiences. Some of the resources such as recipe books were displayed on an outdoor fence. This meant that children could not easily access them and limited their effectiveness in promoting children's play.

The separate outdoor area referred to as the "secret garden" was a highlight of the children's outdoor play. Children accessed this more natural area as a whole class. They were able to move freely, explore and investigate. Children confidently explained the planting areas and used their

imagination in making dens here. The manager and staff should consider how to best support children's individual choice in how and when they access this area.

Children's safety was promoted through effective identification and assessment of hazards and risks. Staff supported children's awareness and management of risk through discussion and their participation in risk assessments in developmentally appropriate ways. Children's health was promoted through effective infection prevention and control measures. Surfaces were regularly wiped and kept clear. Children and staff washed their hands at appropriate times. Staff used songs and rhymes as well as role modelling to support this.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: good

3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well

There was a shared vision values and aims for the service. This had been reviewed and updated recently with input from stakeholders such as parents, staff and children. This helped everyone to know what was important for the service to meet the needs of children. Regular reviews of this would ensure that it continues to reflect the provision.

There were opportunities for parents to provide feedback and make suggestions for improvements. These included face to face communications and responses to online surveys. This supported parents to be involved in the development of the service. Children's voice was captured through observation and discussion, some of which was scribed into floor books. Continued development in this area will build on these strengths and ensure that children effectively influence the self-evaluation and development of the service.

The management team and staff were committed to providing quality care and learning for children through the continuous development of the service. Staff were involved in the self-evaluation, aware of the improvement plan and confident in their role in implementing change. A system of quality assurance was in place and identifying where change was needed, for example in improving the observation and planning for learning. This and other focus areas such as the environment were included in the services improvement plan.

The current improvement plan was wide reaching. We suggested that streamlining this into more focused areas would support the management and sustainability of change.

The plan included intended outcomes of change which were centred around children's experiences and outcomes. Going forward the manager should include a clear success criteria and detail of how this would be measured. This would support the evaluation of changes and ensure they have the desired impact for children.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: good

4.3 Staff deployment

There was enough staff to meet children's needs and promote their engagement. Children benefitted as the manager recognised the importance of appropriate staffing levels to support positive interactions and relationships. Staff were available throughout the day to provide a continuity of care and promote positive communication and transitions. Arrangements for absence were made considering children's needs and to promote attachments. This positively impacted on communication with families who told us they felt staff were kind and approachable.

Staff had a range of skills, experience and knowledge. They worked to their strengths and interests while supporting the children. There were opportunities for them to share information about training and experiences. Staff told us the manager was supportive, and they were comfortable to make suggestions or ask for support. Annual individual meetings with the manager were due to take place. These provide opportunities to celebrate success and identify where support or further training may be beneficial. The manager should ensure that they take place.

Children were supported by a strong staff team who worked well together. They were proactive in recognising where children needed their support and ensuring there was adequate supervision to promote children's safety. They should now consider how best to use staff deployment to increase children's choice when using areas away from the nursery environment. For example, supporting children to access the secret garden in smaller groups rather than a whole class.

Staff told us they felt supported by the management team and their colleagues. They communicated well with each other, for example, when tasks took them away from the children. Staff treated each other with courtesy and respect which provided positive role models and a happy atmosphere for children and families.

A system of mentoring was in place for students and new staff to support them in becoming confident in their roles and responsibilities. An induction format was used with new and relief staff to increase their awareness of the routines of the nursery and needs of individual children. These systems supported staff in meeting children's needs and promoting positive experiences and outcomes.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: good

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

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.