

# Summarised inspection findings

**Port Elphinstone School Nursery Class**

Aberdeenshire Council

20 May 2025

# Key contextual information

Port Elphinstone Nursery class is part of Port Elphinstone Primary School in Aberdeenshire. The nursery is located in a detached building in the school playground and has one playroom with direct access to a small outdoor area. The primary school headteacher has overall responsibility for the nursery. The registered manager is an Early Years Senior Practitioner (EYSP). She has been in this post since January 2025. There is an early years lead practitioner, two early years practitioners and two early years support workers. The nursery is registered for 20 children aged three to starting school, attending at any one time. There are currently 22 children on the roll. They access 1140 hours of early learning and childcare through a variety of flexible attendance patterns between 8am and 6pm during term time. Most children attend between the primary school hours of 9am and 3.30pm. The majority of children have English as an additional language.

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"><li>■ developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the setting and its community</li><li>■ strategic planning for continuous improvement</li><li>■ implementing improvement and change</li></ul>	

- Practitioners have created an appropriate vision and values in consultation with children and families. All staff model the vision and values very effectively through their daily interactions with children and each other. As a result, children demonstrate the values in their play. This achieves a nurturing environment where children are happy and well supported. Parents are regularly invited to comment on how well the nursery’s vision and values are evident in the day-to-day life of the nursery. Staff use this feedback as part of their self-evaluation evidence to make improvements.
- The headteacher and manager lead and support practitioners very effectively. They motivate and encourage each member of the team to contribute to nursery improvements. The headteacher has ensured the nursery is an integral part of the school. In her short time in post the manager has made important changes, including enhancing teamwork and documenting children’s learning. Practitioners regularly undertake professional learning to deepen their knowledge and enhance their skills. They undertake leadership roles willingly in a wide range of areas. For example, they have focused efforts on improving family engagement through literacy. This has increased collaboration with families and is having a positive impact on children’s learning experiences. All practitioners participate enthusiastically in Aberdeenshire Council training events. This has inspired staff to adopt new approaches, for example in numeracy and wellbeing. As a result of nurture training, staff support children effectively with their emotional regulation.
- Children lead their own learning well overall. They undertake roles as helpers at lunchtime and snack. However, there is scope to extend these leadership roles. Children’s views are sought and acted upon. Children are invited to comment on playroom experiences and how they can change or be improved. This has resulted in play activities which reflect further the children’s interests and increase their motivation. Children play an active role in taking their ideas forward into practice.

- The nursery action plan sets out three major priorities for improvement. This has resulted in the recent development of a well-structured quality assurance calendar. A helpful review of planning, assessment and tracking children's progress is ongoing. The manager has a very clear understanding of the nursery's current strengths, and of those developments which will be needed to improve the nursery further.
- The staff team are at the early stages of developing their approaches to quality assurance and self-evaluation. Practitioners, already reflective in their day-to-day work, are starting to use Aberdeenshire Council's Self Evaluation Framework to audit aspects of their practice. They show skill in evaluating play experiences and adapting them to take account of their findings. They would now benefit from using national guidance on early years best practice to reflect on and improve their skills. This could help staff identify what best practice might look like in Port Elphinstone Nursery Class.

## 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

- All children are happy, settled and enjoy their time at nursery. They are motivated, highly engaged and enthusiastic. Most concentrate well and display creativity using the many resources available to them. All practitioners are gentle, nurturing and support children effectively. They have developed successfully a communication-rich environment where all children can participate fully. They should now consider extending literacy and numeracy opportunities through outdoor play. Practitioners offer experiences which meet the learning needs of most children but would benefit from increasing challenge appropriately for a few children.
- All practitioners use a wide range of open-ended questions and explanations to extend children's thinking and learning. Their professional learning, which has been supported by worthwhile training, results in confident well-informed interactions. These include showing skill and good judgement in giving children time to process questions or new ideas. Children's voice is strong and consistently respected in the variety of interactions. For example, children choose resources for the outdoor areas and their ideas inform playroom planning.
- All practitioners provide positive role models for children and support them skilfully to regulate their feeling and emotions. If children need a quiet space, they can freely access a calm zone. Children talk about how they feel and many show empathy for their friends. Almost all children behave well, and practitioners engage skilfully in restorative conversations with them when needed.
- Staff develop their planning for learning based on children's interests. Practitioners also plan a balance of adult-initiated experiences to engage and motivate children. Staff are developing their planning approaches to ensure a stronger focus on skills children might learn from their play experiences. Practitioners note their observations of each child's learning, recording significant learning in online learning journals. They are beginning to use observations well to identify next steps in learning, for groups and for individuals. Practitioners are developing their use of learning walls to fully document and develop children's interests. This is helping staff to identify possible lines of development through play. The manager is aware of the need to give parents more regular information on how their children are progressing.
- With strong support from the local authority, practitioners are reviewing and streamlining planning, tracking and assessment processes. They have clear plans in place to develop new procedures to better track children's progress in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Practitioners should continue to ensure high expectations for children's learning, with the appropriate level of support and challenge.

- Practitioners provide good support to children who require additional help with their learning. Most children have support plans in place which identify appropriate strategies. However, a minority of children would benefit from better targeted interventions to help them make the best possible progress. Practitioners plan with parents and partners, including the sensory support team, to ensure that children have access to the full range of experiences. Parents comment positively on the effective support the nursery provides for children.

## 2.2 Curriculum: Learning and developmental pathways

- Practitioners provide an appropriate curriculum that is play-based, engaging and responsive to children's ideas and interests. All staff are working together to develop an appropriate balance between experiences which are child-led and those initiated by adults. The staff develop the curriculum around the experiences and outcomes from Curriculum for Excellence. They track learning experiences to ensure children cover a suitably broad range of curriculum areas.
- Staff enhance the curriculum through a range of visits in the local area, including Blythwood and Davidson's Park. Children enjoyed a recent river walk where they were able to identify different birds and other wildlife. This is helping children develop a good understanding of the local area and aspects of the natural world. Practitioners invite parents to share their skills with the children. Most recently children have learned about Syrian cooking from a chef, observed different art styles from an artist and learned about the work of a local vet.
- Practitioners have developed well-established supports as children progress from home to nursery and from nursery into primary one. Nursery children make regular visits to the primary school to use the P1 classroom and meet the teacher. Practitioners share information on children's progress with teachers, to support children's learning as they move on to school. The headteacher is actively supporting practitioners and teachers to collaborate across the early level of Curriculum for Excellence. This could help all staff develop a shared understanding of early years pedagogy and further support continuity and progression.

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

- Practitioners seek the view of parents regularly and frequently throughout the year, including through nursery surveys and questionnaires. Parents contribute to the nursery's vision and values tree. Staff value them a key partners in their child's life at nursery. They are very positive about the nursery and the opportunities staff provide to engage with them and become involved in their children's learning. Examples include sports activities, family picnics, and stay and play sessions. Staff regularly review these experiences to ensure they meet parents' needs.
- Parents receive verbal updates on their children at the end of each day and appreciate the nursery's regular newsletters. Practitioners are aware of the need to improve arrangements for updating parents more frequently by using a new online platform.
- Practitioners have good links with the community. Examples include visits to the garden centre, local street and woodland, all of which are supporting positive experiences for children. Practitioners are working to reinstate their work on intergenerational links which ceased when the local care home closed. The manager continues to actively seek opportunities for relevant and meaningful partnership working.

## 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

very 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

- All practitioners have established very positive, caring relationships with children. They are highly responsive to those children who take time to settle. Staff have engaged well in professional learning which has contributed to their awareness of issues of wellbeing. They understand the importance of developing this knowledge with children. Practitioners know children well and treat them with high levels of dignity and respect. This supports children to learn in a nursery where they know staff care for them and want them to be the best they can be.
- Practitioners provide very good role models and children demonstrate good manners and kindness towards each other. Children use a calm area if they feel angry or upset, and practitioners show skill in helping children regulate their emotions. Children are learning that their actions affect others, and many show empathy towards their friends.
- Practitioners refer frequently to the national wellbeing indicators during the nursery day. Children talk confidently about how to keep themselves safe, active and healthy. Practitioners focus on specific wellbeing indicators each term and ensure children revisit them regularly. Children from the nursery recently worked with pupils from P6 and P7 to learn about the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child. As a result, children have developed their understanding of their right to have a name, be safe, fed, and live in a clean environment.
- Practitioners comply with all statutory requirements in relations to early learning and childcare. They are clear about their responsibilities for keeping children safe. Each child has a personal plan which outlines their care and health needs. Practitioners use these plans to identify strategies to support individual needs. Most staff have undertaken professional learning to ensure that they fully understand the processes to help children who encounter barriers to learning. Practitioners enjoy strong and productive links with a range of professional and support agencies, implementing their advice to ensure that children make the best possible progress.
- Practitioners value and celebrate diversity, ensuring everyone is valued as part of the nursery community. They treat children and each other with respect and support children well to develop a positive attitude to differences and diversity. The staff team translate common words and communicate with many children in their native languages. Practitioners are successfully developing children's understanding as global citizens, including issues of diversity outwith children's immediate experience. They should continue to promote gender equality effectively with children to ensure potential stereotypes are recognised and challenged. The staff team is fully aware of possible barriers to learning and ensure that all children can participate fully. This includes offering outdoor clothing and footwear, and funding outings. Practitioners helpfully signpost parents to sources of local support.

### 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 are making good progress in communication and early language. Almost all listen well to staff's instructions. Most talk confidently and readily approach adults for help. They enjoy accessing matrix barcodes to listen to stories and rhymes. Children vote for their preferred stories and identify favourite illustrations and characters. They would benefit from more regular storytelling and access to a wider range of texts. A minority of children write their name and a few recognise alphabet letters. To improve progress further, staff need to provide children with access to a wider range of writing opportunities. These should include examples of different types of writing and alphabet letters to make their name and simple words.
- Children's progress in early mathematics is good. Most children count to ten and beyond and a majority recognise number symbols. They are learning about positional language as they programme remote controlled toys to move in different directions. Children use timers to manage their use of laptops. A few children know how to match two parts of a symmetrical shape. Most children recognise simple two-dimensional shapes and can accurately refer to sides and corners. They enjoyed using tally marks to count the numbers of different birds they saw on their nature hunt. They now need more opportunities to gain experience about numbers in the environment, and to apply mathematical concepts in their play.
- Children are making very good progress in health and wellbeing. They are developing resilience and physical strength as they climb, slide, balance, run and negotiate rugged terrain. They understand how to keep themselves safe at a campfire, when using tools and when exploring the woods. Most children talk about how exercise and healthy foods support them to keep fit and well. Children recently benefitted from working with a sports coordinator. They improve their gymnastics skills and enjoy a range of activities involving balls and bean bags. Through this they develop their fine motor skills.
- Children are achieving well in a range of areas. They are learning about the growth of plants and vegetables through gardening experiences. They are becoming increasingly confident in using digital technologies including tablets, programmable toys, cameras, torches and binoculars. They learned about different sea creatures during a visit from staff from Macduff Aquarium. Children are actively encouraged to share wider achievements from home with the nursery.

- Almost all children are making good progress over time, appropriate to their age and stage of development. Practitioners have identified the need to track children's progress more systematically. As the staff team improves planning and recording of children's learning across all key areas, they will gather a more accurate picture of children's progress. This will also help them understand the impact of the nursery experiences they offer.
- All staff know families and the needs of the local community very well. The staff team provides sensitive and well-judged support to children and their families, promoting a culture of inclusion. Staff could now consider the use of planned interventions to strengthen individual support, for example to develop children's spoken language or pencil control. The manager is aware of the need to make use of all the information and data available to the nursery, to ensure equity for all and to support children to make the best possible progress.

## 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.