

Summarised inspection findings

Sgoil-àraich Sgoil Lionail - Lionel School

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

23 April 2024

Key contextual information

Sgoil-Àraich Sgoil Lionail (Lionel Early Learning and Childcare) is situated in Sgoil Lionail – Lionel School in Nis (Ness) on the Isle of Lewis. It provides early learning and childcare provision through the medium of Gàidhlig (Gaelic) as part of Comhairle nan Eilean’s ‘Gaelic First’ policy. The sgoil-àraich operates from 9 am to 4 pm every school day during term time. The young children can attend a few clubs available at the adjacent Spòrs Nis (a sports centre in Ness). This supports further parents with employment.

The sgoil-àraich is registered for up to 25 children aged between two to those not yet enrolled in sgoil (school) to attend at any given time. At the time of the inspection, 12 children aged two years or over were registered for the sgoil-àraich.

The headteacher for Sgoil Lionail is the sgoil-àraich manager. The headteacher post has been vacant since June 2023. The executive headteacher for rural Lewis is currently interim headteacher for Sgoil Lionail. This arrangement is in place from August 2023-2024. The executive headteacher has strategic responsibility for Sgoil Lionail, as well as other schools and sgoiltean-àraich in Lewis.

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.

- Children are happy, safe and secure in their total immersion play. They learn Gàidhlig in a caring and nurturing atmosphere, in which practitioners plan a range of learning experiences. Practitioners provide an important start, with families, to children’s journey to fluency in Gàidhlig and bilingualism. Children confidently choose from a range of play activities. They concentrate with determination for extended periods. For most of the time, practitioners have regular conversations with children so that they hear and absorb Gàidhlig. Children who are fluent in Gàidhlig from home respond in the language. The younger children engage in play, in which they enjoy repeating the same action to develop their curiosity.
- Practitioners have effectively built their confidence in total immersion approaches. They make well-judged use of ‘The Advice on Gaelic Education’ (2022) to guide and review their approaches to total immersion. Practitioners read stories to children, use commentary and actions, sing songs and play games. Practitioners plan group activities to focus on developing children’s Gàidhlig. They should continue to develop specific activities for children to extend their learning and fluency across more areas of the curriculum. Practitioners make effective use of routines, such as snack for children to socialise and develop skills in Gàidhlig. This gives children a comfortable atmosphere, in which an increasing number of them use Gàidhlig. Children should be encouraged to develop further their imaginations and language in role-play.

- Children enjoy learning in the outdoors. They take responsibility for changing into clothes suitable for being outside. Children develop well their balance and gross motor skills by riding tricycles. Children go for walks on the Island to explore areas of interest in nature. Practitioners should increase the range of outdoor play activities available immediately adjacent to the playroom. This would continue enticing children to play in range of language-rich contexts and total immersion experiences in the outdoors.
- Practitioners observe well children as they play. They are becoming more skilled at recording children's learning and their next step in securing progress. Practitioners are successfully increasing parents' engagement with children's total immersion and progress. They do so by sharing children's learning on a digital platform. Children should be more involved in sharing their learning. Practitioners have developed valid assessments for literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing to provide baseline data to demonstrate children's progress. They should now also observe children's understanding from continuous conversation and use of Gaidhlig in total immersion. This is in addition to single-word vocabulary. Practitioners also check children's progress using development milestones. Practitioners engage with moderation activities within the sgoil-àraich. They also moderate standards with practitioners in a nearby sgoil-àraich. Practitioners are becoming increasingly confident in using national Benchmarks to make judgements within the early level of Curriculum for Excellence.
- The acting headteacher discusses children's progress with practitioners. They use a newly introduced digital system to record and monitor how well children are learning in literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing. Practitioners use this information to plan well next steps in learning and what total immersion approaches to use.
- Practitioners use 'An Leabhar Mòr' (The Big Book) well to plan learning using children's interests as a basis for themes to explore. They also have useful progression pathways for literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing to guide planning for children's learning. Practitioners should increase their use of progression pathways across the curriculum. This is to challenge further those children who are fluent in understanding and talking, as relevant to their age.

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.

3.2 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

- A few children make very good progress in communication and early Gàidhlig language skills. These children use Gàidhlig confidently in each of the sgoil-àraich's contexts. Most children make good progress in early Gàidhlig language skills. These children understand almost all the Gàidhlig language that is used in total immersion. The majority of children show their understanding by responding in Gàidhlig, or through actions. All children answer questions to give personal details, such as where they live and how old they are. Children request to sing particular songs using Gàidhlig titles. They are now ready to learn more songs connected to their total immersion contexts. Children enjoy having stories read aloud to them. They ask questions about the text and illustrations. They repeat phrases and predict what may happen next. Children should be encouraged to use texts in all contexts in which they play. Older children develop well their early writing skills. A few can write their name.
- Most children make good progress in early numeracy and mathematics. They count in sequence and identify numbers up to ten as part of telephone numbers. Children link literacy and numeracy skills by using friends' phone numbers to chat and keep in touch. Children develop their early use of money in Bùth (shop) Lionail. As children experiment with filling containers with water, they develop early knowledge of quantities and volume. Children solve quickly problems and think of shapes by doing jigsaws. Children should develop further the language of movement and measure in total immersion play contexts.
- Overall, children make good progress in health and wellbeing. All children are content and settle quickly in the sgoil-àraich. They share how they feel as part of an emotional check-in routine. Children wait patiently for their turn in total immersion play. They enjoy good relationships and friendships with each other. Children are developing well their physical skills. There are a few situations in which children develop their understanding of taking risks. Children understand their role in hygiene through toothbrushing and when to wash their hands. Children assist practitioners in preparing a snack and are independent in serving themselves. Most children are resilient in playing outdoors in less favourable weather. Practitioners should continue to support children to understand their own wellbeing using the national indicators, in an age-appropriate way.
- Children, including those who have potential barriers to their learning, make good progress in their learning and development over time. Children are confident and successful in their learning of Gàidhlig. This is resulting in an increasing proportion of children continuing with Gàidhlig Medium Education at the primary stages. Most children are ready to be challenged

more to increase their knowledge, skills and understanding across all curricular areas. This will support all children to make the progress of which they are capable.

- Practitioners capture children's achievements within a digital journal, An Leabhar Mòr and the rionnagan (stars) wall chart. As a next step, children should be more independent in recording and talking about their achievements. To facilitate this, it would be useful to ensure that children have free access to summaries of their achievements. Children successfully celebrate their achievements with teachers at the primary stages as part of preparing for moving from sgoil-àraich to P1.
- Practitioners know their children well. Local organisations donate gifts to support equity. For example, all children have suitable clothing for learning in the outdoors. Practitioners recognise the importance of parents having regular feedback to help them support their child's learning. They also know that helping parents hear and see their children's good progress in fluency of Gàidhlig is key to parents selecting Gàidhlig Medium Education in P1 onwards.

Practice worth sharing more widely

The executive headteacher and practitioners have taken forward important steps to lay foundations for Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's 'Gaelic First' policy. The executive headteacher has worked with all stakeholders to talk about individuals' identity, as well as children's identity for Gàidhlig and Nis (Ness). She has captured this as the Niseach identity. This is driving the strategic direction of 'Gaelic First' in the sgoil-àraich. The executive headteacher is using the collaborative work on the Niseach identity to design a curriculum that promotes what is important to Nis and the island.

Practitioners are dutiful in speaking Gaelic to achieve total immersion for children. They do so in a caring, nurturing and safe atmosphere. Children are comfortable and confident to be immersed in Gàidhlig. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar are using apprenticeship programmes to support recruitment of practitioners. The sgoil-àraich is staffed with practitioners who speak Gàidhlig.

Practitioners provide children with a range of enjoyable activities to extend their learning and fluency. They recognise their role in ensuring the sustainability of the Gàidhlig language and the island's unique features.

The teacher of Gàidhlig Medium Education at the early level has a weekly time in the sgoil-àraich. All children from age two to five get to know the teacher. This has positive impact on transition and for children's continuity with Gàidhlig Medium Education at the primary stages.

Other relevant evidence

- Practitioners at the sgoil-àraich are making good progress with the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education (2017). They provide children with total immersion in all aspects of the sgoil-àraich. This results in children's strong fluency in Gàidhlig by the time they leave the sgoil-àraich. All practitioners speak Gàidhlig. The comhairle has established a modern apprenticeship pathway to increase staffing. Practitioners should continue accessing professional learning in total immersion and in Gàidhlig language skills. The comhairle's 'Gaelic First' policy is yet to lead to all children continuing with Gàidhlig in P1 to the end of P7. The 'Gaelic First' policy means that parents do not need to ask for a placing request for their children to continue with Gàidhlig Medium Education.

1.1 Nurturing care and support

Children were very happy, settled and confident in the setting. They were familiar with the environment, the routine and experienced warmth, kindness and respect from all staff. We observed nurturing relationships between children, staff and their peers throughout the session. This helped children to feel cared for and safe. Staff were skilled at building resilience and identifying when children were needing reassurance, love or comfort.

Children enjoyed a positive lunch and snack experience which was sociable, relaxed and unhurried. At lunchtime, the children were taken by staff along to the school dining hall. Some children had brought a packed lunch to nursery and this was stored in a safe manner. Other children were supported by staff to choose, what they wanted to eat from a range of food choices that were nutritious and reflect current guidance. These choices were appropriate for children's individual cultural and dietary needs. Staff and children sat together laughing and chatting, this approach enabled children to build social skills and good behaviours associated with eating and drinking. Staff were focused on all children and could respond immediately should an emergency, such as choking, occur.

Personal planning reflected the holistic needs of each child to improve their wellbeing and support positive outcomes. Staff had worked closely with families to gather and share effective information on children's personal preferences and their life outside nursery. Relevant staff worked proactively with children, families, and other professionals to identify appropriate next steps and strategies based on individual needs and prior learning. This information was used consistently and effectively by all to ensure positive outcomes for children. We observed good "All About Me" information recorded for individual children. This included information about children's routines, their favourite toys, likes and dislikes. This was used successfully by staff to support children's individual needs and promote consistency and continuity of care.

Care Inspectorate grade: very good

1.3 Play and learning

Children were meaningfully and actively involved in leading their play and learning through a balance of spontaneous and planned quality experiences that promoted children's choice and independence. Well considered innovations and creative approaches successfully engaged children's imagination and enriched their play and learning. These play experiences contributed to develop children's skills in language, literacy and numeracy. The staff had created a fun learning environment that was fully immersed in Gaelic language. Some experiences were being shared with parents through See Saw and the management team, shared with us, their plans to enhance this.

Children moved easily around the play areas independently and transporting toys as they wished. Staff took time to listen, talk and communicate with children. Effective use of questioning extended children's thinking, widened their skills, and consolidated their learning through play. This meant staff could respond meaningfully to children's needs, wishes and this supported children's overall wellbeing and sense of belonging. Staff arranged meetings for parents to come in and discuss, any aspect of their child's play and learning. Staff told us that they valued this opportunity to meet with parents on an individual basis. This meant children's care and learning routines were individual to their needs and were delivered with kindness and compassion.

Staff had a good understanding of child development, relevant theory, and practice, and skilfully used this to support quality play and learning experiences. They supported the emotional resilience of children and families through holistic and nurturing approaches to secure children's wellbeing including their right to play. Staff observations and interactions promoted children's creativity and curiosity.

Planning Books took account of children's interests, views and opinions which demonstrated their involvement in the planning process and that their voices were highly valued. The staff were at the early stages of implementing Gaelic progression pathways as part of providing depth in children's learning. Staff told us that were supported well by the management team. We reviewed minutes from their weekly planning meetings and concluded that these meetings secured better learning outcomes for children.

Care Inspectorate grade: good

2.2 Children experience high quality facilities

We found the service to be welcoming, and well-ventilated. This gave a strong message to children that they matter, and they had ample space for their needs. There was a secure entry system in place which was monitored by staff. Management and staff had worked on the visual environment developing areas inside following the last inspection with a focus on ensuring the environment was organised and inviting. Children's artwork was displayed to celebrate their achievements. These well considered innovations and creative approaches enriched children's play and learning.

Play spaces both indoor and out were developmentally appropriate. Children had access to a wide range of resources that supported and challenged their play and learning. Lots of loose parts and opportunities to be curious were well used by children outdoors. Staff planned areas within each play space in response to children's interests. Play areas developed children's imagination and developed their skills in language, literacy and numeracy.

Staff completed daily registers. We observed staff communicating well with each other to ensure they were accounting for all children. Registers were accurate and used to show how many children were in the playroom and how many were outside.

There were maintenance records in place and the maintenance team were responding appropriately. Risk assessments were in place for play spaces, and on sampling these we found they detailed risk clearly and any mitigation and measures that were required. This supported children's safety.

Since last inspection we observed more effective infection prevention and control practices were in place to provide high levels of safety for children. These were supported by effective quality assurance practices. We sampled accident and incident records which were held in children's individual files and found these were being shared with parents. Staff annually received appropriate training on infection prevention and control and were confident in ensuring a safe environment for themselves and the children in their care.

Protection of children's personal information was paramount and complied with relevant best practice. Leaders and staff were well-informed about their responsibilities.

Care Inspectorate grade: good

3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well

The nursery was well supported by a strong, approachable acting headteacher who delegated responsibility appropriately to the nursery team and involved them in the development of the service. The day to day management of the nursery was carried out by an effective Playleader, who had promoted a clear vision that helped staff to develop meaningful aspirations for children and their families.

Self-evaluation enabled the service to deliver quality care and support tailored towards children's and families' particular needs and choices. Staff reflected well together and used these reflections to bring about positive change to outcomes for children and families. For example, staff had reflected on children's lunch time experiences, and used their reflections to implement more opportunities for children to be independent. We observed children confidently self-selecting their own, cutlery, crockery meals and drinks.

The play leader had created a strong culture of learning opportunities, where all staff felt confident to initiate well-informed change and share responsibility for improving the experience. She demonstrated a strong professional understanding of the importance of a shared ethos and commitment to developing high quality play, based on children's needs and interests.

The skilled management team ensured quality learning through play was at the heart of their improvement planning. A well understood and meaningful improvement plan was in place. The manager and staff team were meaningfully utilising Education Scotland's guidance: How good is our early learning and childcare, Care Inspectorate's guidance: A quality framework for daycare of children and school-aged childcare to successfully self-evaluate the service. A quality calendar was in place to support the self-evaluation and improvement plan actions. The calendar tasks included: audits, evaluating children's progress data, facilitating staff quality conversations, scheduling playroom practice, staff monitoring, and peer monitoring. We reviewed the evidence the management team had gathered, and the process used to self-evaluate the service. Together staff and management should continue to make positive improvements to the outcomes for children.

Care Inspectorate grade: good

4.3 Staff deployment

Staff engaged very well in the inspection process and were open and honest during discussions. Staff felt supported by the management team and were able to approach them with any concerns. All staff were observed to work well together. This helped to contribute to a happy and welcoming atmosphere. Staff felt valued and listened to. They told us that that the Playleader worked hard to ensure staff got time to discuss and reflect the overall developments of the children's environment along with time to reflect on Childrens Individual targets.

The manager and staff recognised that continuity of care was important for children. Staff breaks were planned well to minimise disruption and to ensure appropriate levels of staffing, such as during children's lunch time. Good use was made of the differing experience, knowledge and skills of the staff group to ensure children's experiences across the whole day were positive and safe. Staff told us that they worked well together and felt valued by the manager. They told us that they were proud of the nursery and were enthusiastic to provide the best outcomes possible for the children and their families.

Staff had a clear understanding of how children develop and learn. They made good use of professional development opportunities that linked directly to enhanced outcomes for children, these included, early literacy strategies, total immersion and audit toolkit and child protection refresh, to name a few. We could see that staff used this learning well to encourage children to

use books and extend their language. This resulted in better learning outcomes and fun for children.

Effective team working, fostered a warm atmosphere where staff were courteous and respectful, in this service. Staff caring for children were registered with the Scottish Social Services Council. They are the regulatory body responsible for registering the social services workforce. They provide public protection by promoting high standards of conduct and practice and support the professional development of those registered with them.

Care Inspectorate grade: good

During the previous Care Inspectorate inspection, the setting had three requirements and three areas of improvement. All of these have now been met.

As a result of this inspection, there are no requirements and no areas 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.