

# Summarised inspection findings

**Elphinstone Primary School and Nursery Class**

East Lothian Council

06 November 2018

## Key contextual information

Elphinstone Primary School nursery class operates on a morning only basis. At the time of inspection there were 11 children registered to attend. The headteacher and nursery practitioner had taken up post just a few weeks prior to the inspection.

### 1.3 Leadership of change

good

This indicator focuses on working together at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which reflects the context of the setting within its community. Planning for continuous improvement change should be evidence-based and clearly linked to strong self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure that the pace of change is well judged and appropriate to have a positive impact on outcomes for children. The themes are:

- developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the setting and its community
- strategic planning for continuous improvement
- implementing improvement and change

- Practitioners strive to do their best for children and their families. Working with practitioners, parents and the community, the school is developing a clear rationale and vision for the improvement of the whole school, which incorporates the development of the early learning and childcare (ELC) class. The committed, supportive and reflective headteacher has quickly established her commitment to leading with a clear focus on embedding values and supporting improvement. She has a very good understanding of the strengths and aspects for development in the nursery.
- Practitioners report the newly appointed headteacher takes a very keen interest in the work of the ELC class. Relationships of mutual respect and trust are being developed swiftly. The ELC team are reflective practitioners and are keen to develop and improve their practice. For example, they use knowledge gained from professional learning opportunities to reflect on how they use questions and interactions to support children's learning. This approach has helped to develop effective pedagogy within the ELC class and improve outcomes for children and families.
- The headteacher has assumed responsibility for developing and monitoring the work of the nursery. She has correctly identified the need to review procedures to monitor the work of the ELC class and children's learning and progress more formally. This session the headteacher, together with practitioners, plans to review how the team use national indicators of performance. This will provide helpful support to practitioners in order to evaluate and monitor the quality of the work of the nursery. The headteacher should continue to develop this approach to support a more focused approach to improvement. This will allow aspects for change to be monitored more effectively. Practitioners would benefit from focused visits to other ELC settings to review best practice.
- Regular meetings are used to evaluate the quality of provision and children's learning. Parents are asked to provide feedback at events, meetings and through regular informal contact with the ELC class. It would be beneficial to formalise approaches to gathering parents' views to provide useful evidence to support the development of the nursery's improvement agenda.

- The school improvement plan includes priorities that impact on the nursery class. Practitioners are involved in reviewing the quality of the curriculum and developing approaches to family learning. They confidently assume responsibility for taking forward aspects of the school's improvement agenda. They should continue to be involved in sharing developments in the nursery with school staff, to ensure continuity and progression for children in their learning as they move on to P1.

## 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

- Individual children receive a warm welcome into the ELC class. They are well supported by practitioners who know them and recognise their individual emotional and developmental needs. Children are happy, safe, secure and are developing confidence within nursery. They engage well and enjoy learning through child-led play. They are developing their independence and take responsibility for aspects of their learning. Children make choices and select materials to develop their creativity and play from the quality resources both indoors and outside.
- The compact outdoor play area is accessed daily by children, with a focus on the development of high-quality learning experiences, planned in context. Children confidently access the outdoor play space and have recently benefited from regular access to the school playing field. Effective use has been made of local woodland areas during 'Nature Nurture' sessions. Practitioners plan to use this approach to provide further challenge for children outdoors this session. Good use is made of computers to support learning indoors. Practitioners should explore how to best use digital cameras and similar resources when children are playing outside.
- The ELC class is structured to provide a wide range of learning experiences that reflect children's enquiries and help to challenge and sustain their interest. Children's views are listened to and support the development of the playroom provision. This gives children opportunities to develop curiosity, deepen their learning and make play more purposeful. There is an appropriate balance between the time children spend choosing activities and time spent in adult-directed groups. Generally, practitioners are sensitive to children's engagement in their play and use a flexible approach to avoid disrupting quality play for more adult-led activities. Practitioners should review the organisation of the end of the session, as children do not have sufficient opportunities to choose activities at this time or to access outdoor play.
- Practitioners engage effectively with children using high quality questioning skills and building on children's prior knowledge. Children share their knowledge and experiences, talking with increasing confidence to practitioners and each other. They are well supported to find out more about topics that interest them and to develop their ideas. In a few activities, children would benefit from increased challenge.
- Individual children's 'learning stories' include detailed observations of children's learning, photographic evidence and a few samples of their work. Children enjoy looking at their 'learning stories'. As a next step, practitioners should explore how children can more fully

contribute to them. Practitioners identify appropriate next stages in children's learning. Parents regularly contribute to children's 'learning stories' using 'star moment' sheets. Practitioners should continue to support parents to share their children's learning and achievements from home.

- Practitioners use a variety of planning formats, including floor books, to plan and record children's learning. They effectively use children's interests to plan responsively. Practitioners engage in regular professional dialogue to discuss the progress children are making in their learning. They have identified the need to review and improve how they formally track and monitor children's progress.

## 2.2 Curriculum: Learning and development pathways

- Planning takes account of national guidance and delivers all essential aspects for early learning, including an emphasis on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Practitioners use children's interests to plan for their learning and use the experiences and outcomes to provide a broad range of learning contexts for children. The approach used to record responsive planning is useful and highlights the importance placed on using children's voice to shape the curriculum offered.
- Practitioners plan for daily outdoor learning experiences and evaluate how they use this space to support learning across the curriculum. This environment is inviting to children and engages them purposefully in a range of learning experiences. Effective use is made of planned community visits to support children's opportunities to learn about the world of work. Children make use of the digital technologies available to extend their learning but this could be improved. The continued use of real life experiences should be maximised to support children to apply and develop further their skills in a progressive way in new contexts.
- Transitions from home into the nursery are managed very well. For the youngest children, this is further supported by developing early relationships through positive links with the adjacent playgroup. A range of effective activities ensures a smooth transition from nursery into P1 for all children. This includes sharing of information on children's learning, visits to P1 classrooms and sharing resources. The headteacher and practitioners are aware of the importance of building on the use of play-based approaches to learning across the early stages of school. As this develops, continuity and progression in children's learning as they move to P1 will be supported more effectively.

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

- Families are made to feel very welcome in the nursery. Through a range of opportunities, including stay and play sessions and coffee mornings, parents are contributing to children's learning experiences. Practitioners encourage parents to be involved in their children's learning through taking home story bags and games to share. This approach has been positively received by parents. Parents have identified they would benefit from a wider range of home learning opportunities and plans are in place to facilitate this. Practitioners value parents' views of their children's achievements and encourage these to be shared in children's 'learning stories'. By working closely with families, practitioners should continue to identify ways they can increase the range of opportunities for involving parents in their child's development of literacy and numeracy skills.

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

### 3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

good

This indicator reflects on the setting's approach to children's wellbeing which underpins their ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of each individual. A clear focus on wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all children to be the best they can be and celebrates their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- Relationships across the setting are built upon mutual respect and trust, leading to a warm, welcoming ethos for all families. Practitioners know children and families very well, resulting in continuity of care within the nursery. Parents we spoke with felt that they could easily approach practitioners if they had any concerns.
- Children were observed to be happy, confident and increasingly secure in an environment that was safe and supportive. Children's behaviour was positive and in line with their age and stage of development. As children move about the playroom, they are sociable and confidently share their views and make their wishes known. Children could be supported better to tidy toys and games away after they have played with them rather than tidying up at the end of the session. Practitioners are patient and supportive of children's emotional and social needs. They should now explore how best to support children to develop their awareness of the national wellbeing indicators to support planning for children's emotional and mental development. Practitioners should continue to develop approaches to incorporate respect and rights into learning and support children to learn about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Outdoor learning opportunities encourage children to be active and to work together to explore their own solutions in their play. Children benefit from sessions in a local woodland area. They risk assess their play and challenge themselves when balancing on tyre swings and clambering on the school climbing frame. Children are developing a good understanding of how to support their own health and wellbeing through daily routines. Children can talk about foods that are healthy and the importance of hand washing. Opportunities for children to prepare their own snack could be further explored to develop children's responsibility for these tasks.
- Practitioners listen carefully to what children say and act upon children's views in their daily interactions. Practitioners should now provide appropriate opportunities to formalise their consultation with children. For example, children could be supported to share their views, at a developmentally appropriate stage, as members of the pupil council and eco committee.
- There are appropriate arrangements in place to comply with statutory requirements. The headteacher works closely with practitioners and other agencies to ensure that they are proactive in fulfilling their legislative duties. Practitioners engage in professional training which helps them improve the way they support and care for children.

- The leadership team and practitioners have a good understanding of legislative requirements for children who face additional barriers to their learning or require additional support. They have made positive links with a range of other support agencies to help plan to meet individual children's needs. The headteacher has identified the need for the creation of individual child learning plans as appropriate. These should be created in partnership with parents, clearly outline children's learning needs and be regularly reviewed.
- All children are welcomed and included in the life of the nursery. Equality and diversity is celebrated and families are supported in a non-judgemental, inclusive and appropriate way. Practitioners are attentive and respectful of children's backgrounds. They should now consider how they could promote further children's awareness of equality issues and the diversity that exists within their local and wider community. Children are developing an understanding that there are those less fortunate than themselves through participating in national fundraising events and harvest festival collections.

### 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 early literacy. Practitioners interact well with children during free play to extend children's communication and early language skills. They make effective use of signing to support children who require additional help to communicate their needs. Commendably, practitioners use this approach to support all children. They should now consider using symbols to support early communication development. Most children show a keen interest in mark making and enjoy sharing their 'writing' with adults and each other. They are developing skills in writing their name on the whiteboard as they enter nursery and by creating labels for playroom equipment. We have asked practitioners to ensure children continue to develop these skills through a wider range of meaningful contexts indoors and during outdoor learning.
- Children are progressing well in early numeracy and can count when playing with increasing confidence. Children are developing good early mathematical skills through the range of toys and resources available. They are learning about shapes as they build with blocks and loose parts and learn to solve problems. A wide selection of natural materials encourage children to sort, match and group, thus embedding early numerical and mathematical skills. Children are beginning to use appropriate mathematical language as they fill containers with water. Practitioners should to continue to support children to develop early numeracy and mathematical skills through real life contexts and outdoors.
- In health and wellbeing, children are making good progress. Practitioners provide a supportive ethos in the nursery and encourage children to be caring, kind and respectful to others. The emphasis on relationships and inclusion is helping children settle and develop friendships. Children are learning about healthy lifestyles through discussions about healthy snacks and daily active play outdoors. Children climb confidently and are agile when balancing on tyre swings. A few older children are skilled at kicking and throwing balls. Children should now develop skills at managing risks across a wider range of learning contexts, for example using woodwork tools.

- Children enjoy investigating with water and mud outdoors and observing the changes in materials when baking. They plan and create tall structures using bricks and loose parts. They follow instructions to mix powder paints well and use them expressively at the easel. They are developing skills at creating imaginary play scenarios at the house corner and they enthusiastically use the drums to tap out rhythms. They confidently use the interactive whiteboard to self-register and use a range of simple computer programs independently.
- Children are keen to learn and enthusiastically explore the learning environment. It will be important for practitioners to ensure the developing extended outside spaces are numeracy and literacy rich. Practitioners should continue to support children to make choices and decisions about their play and learning in a supportive environment. The headteacher has identified that reviewing playroom organisation would support children to access the outdoor area more freely and further enrich their on-going learning experiences.
- Children's individual achievements within the ELC are captured and celebrated well. Praise is used effectively to support and encourage children and to celebrate their success. Achievements from home are shared well in children's 'learning stories'.
- Practitioners work hard to develop a supportive and inclusive ethos. They are proactive in identifying potential barriers to learning.

## Choice of QI: 2.5 Family Learning

- Engaging families in learning
- Early intervention and prevention
- Quality of family learning programmes

- The quality of relationships between parents and practitioners is a strength of the nursery and school. The headteacher and practitioners are fully committed to engaging families in learning and in providing support to families. They have a sound knowledge of the local context in which children live and possible challenges and barriers they may encounter. Universal support is offered to all families, through ongoing communication with practitioners; through the open-door policy; the welcoming, non-judgemental ethos; and through social media. Parents are invited to attend regular, whole-school learning events that celebrate children's learning and the culture of the local community. Almost all parents, across the primary school and nursery class who responded to the Education Scotland questionnaire, stated that the school gives advice on how to support their child's learning at home.
- In the nursery class, practitioners have been successful in building positive and trusting relationships with families. A range of home-link learning resources are utilised across the year, including take-home story sacks and games. Parents are invited to stay and play sessions and for coffee mornings. As parents themselves have identified through the nursery's own questionnaire, there is scope to involve further parents and carers in the learning within the nursery class. This will support the development of a shared understanding of early learning pedagogy.
- Practitioners have carried out a thorough audit of the range of ways that they encourage parents to participate in the life of the nursery and school, and increasingly, as partners in their children's learning. This audit includes the range of universal support for all, and more targeted interventions to support families. The headteacher has identified the need to take a more pro-active, solution-focused approach to identifying barriers that may exist and by offering the types of targeted support that will best meet the needs of families.
- The development of family learning programmes is at an early stage. As practitioners have identified, there is considerable scope for families to be more engaged in this area, and to participate in co-designing and delivering high-quality learning programmes. For example, practitioners could explore ways to ask parents and families what would support them best to help their children in literacy and numeracy. This could enable parents to gain a deeper and more relevant understanding of what is taught at the school and the methodologies deployed. This would support the next step of moving from parental involvement towards family learning, and in fostering even stronger home-school links.
- With the dedication of all practitioners, and the significant experience of the headteacher in this area, the school is well placed to progress the development of family learning. Practitioners should continue with plans to develop a shared understanding, rationale, vision and aims for family learning at Elphinstone Primary School and nursery. This should be developed with parents and partners, to determine what families would find useful and to ensure successful implementation.

## Care Inspectorate evidence

### 1. Quality of care and support

Children and families were welcomed warmly into nursery by staff. Secure attachments were seen as a result of the calm, warm and nurturing interactions between adults and children. Children were sociable and keen to speak to us and ask questions. Timely assistance and the appropriate physical affection was given to children, which was important in making them feel safe and secure. Consequently, the children appeared happy, engaged and content. Children's learning stories provided a record of children's progress and illustrated a range of activities children had experienced. This coupled with an individual plan to note pastoral care needs ensured that staff recorded and acted on information on children's overall well-being. An 'I had a good idea' system demonstrated that responding to children's interests and needs was at the heart of planning. We were told about plans to further develop the tracking of children's learning and were in agreement that this would enhance the outcomes for children. We spoke about how the wellbeing indicators should be referred to in planning and personal plans. With an enabling attitude and belief in children's potential, children were given the opportunity to direct their own learning during free play and to solve problems for themselves with support, if needed, from staff. However, we did note occasions when staff restricted children's play, for example, they didn't always allow them to move toys and resources from one area to another and children could only participate in baking on certain days. In addition, moving forward, consideration should be given to the length of time children are participating in group/adult led activities throughout the session.

Staff had a shared determination to provide children with the care and support that is right for them. As a result, staff had been instrumental in working with other professionals for support and guidance in meeting needs of children who required additional support. All children were learning to sign which helped increase their life skills and supported inclusion. Parents were complimentary of the way in which their child was cared for and supported in the setting. The manager and staff shared their plans to further support children which instilled us with confidence that outcomes will continue to improve. In embracing the school ethos of valuing parents as significant partners, parental involvement was important in the setting. Staff knew children and their families well and provided them with regular opportunities to be involved in their child's learning and the life of the nursery. The manager had clear plans to further develop parental participation through a more holistic approach to support inclusion and further foster positive relationships and outcomes for families. For example Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) and a Raising Children with Confidence programme.

**Care Inspectorate grade: good**

### 2. Quality of environment

The nursery provided a bright, welcoming, organised and safe environment. Children were able to move around the play space, independently and safely. Children were learning about the importance of personal hygiene and how to keep healthy as they washed their hands after using the toilet and before having their snack. The service was clean and free from hazards; main exits were secured. A robust medication system ensured children's health and well-being.

It was clearly important to staff that playrooms were organised and well planned, thus providing children with fun activities that sparked interest. The layout of resources supported choice and independence, and impacted positively on the learning experiences. A good selection of loose parts and natural resources in the learning environment promoted children's creativity. We did suggest further opportunities to invent and create situations using open-ended resources were needed in the home corner.

Snack time was a sociable time for children where they could sit with their friends and have a chat. We noted limited opportunity for children to be involved in experiences such as preparing snacks, washing dishes. We discussed how including these opportunities would further encourage independence, teach life skills and build children's self-esteem.

Recent improvements to the nursery garden provided children with a learning environment that created a sense of wonder for children. Outdoors, in the school playground we saw children experiencing play which challenged them physically and developed their strength and confidence. Skilled staff stepped into these experiences only when they were invited to do so or when they saw that their input would add value to the experience. We discussed that further opportunities should be available for children to develop the skills to assess and manage risk in their play, for example, two wheeled bikes and woodwork.

We discussed that children's should be able to access the nursery garden for most of the session. The manager was in agreement that children's wellbeing would be further enhanced if the door to the garden was open for the whole session and that children were able to access the school playground more regularly.

Planned 'Nature Nurture' sessions to a nearby woodland area gave children the opportunity to participate in activities such as outdoor cooking, tree climbing and den building. This gave children further opportunities to learn about the natural world and develop new skills. Children's experiences were recorded in a floor book, which meant they could revisit this learning in nursery.

**Care Inspectorate grade: good**

### **3. Quality of staffing**

The two nursery staff were warm, kind and compassionate in how they supported and cared for the children. It was apparent from the quality of their interactions that staff had a genuine regard and respect for the children in their care and wanted them to have a positive experience at nursery. The relationship they had with each other helped to create a friendly, professional, happy place for staff to work and children to be cared for.

The nursery teacher was motivated and professional in her role. She met with other professionals in the local area which created an opportunity for good practice to be shared in group discussions and through visiting other settings. The newly appointed practitioner brought a wealth of experience to the setting which was clearly having a positive impact on the outcomes for children.

Parents told us they felt staff were approachable and had made positive relationships with their children; contributing to children being keen to come to the nursery.

Albeit that the small setting had its advantages, staff felt restricted in what they could do in the session when there were only two staff on duty. The manager was well aware of this and shared there was currently a review of staffing requirements to meet needs, group times, snack arrangements, free flow between the indoors. Developing this would help staff gain confidence in offering a more relaxed and free flow session.

Staff demonstrated that they had a good understanding of their role and responsibility in safeguarding the children in their care. They spoke confidently of what action they would take if concerned about a child's health, wellbeing and protection. Regular child protection training helped keep their knowledge up to date.

Staff had established positive relationships with children and families, showing great respect and empathy. They were clearly familiar with the individual needs of each child and ensured personalised care and support was provided. Staff worked well with other professionals and used their knowledge of the children and their families to meet the needs of individual children.

From our conversations with staff, it was evident that they felt valued and motivated to improve their skills and knowledge with positive outcomes for themselves and the children they looked after. They could describe informal evaluation and the impact of changes they had implemented in the environment. Staff were motivated to take forward relevant improvements.

**Care Inspectorate grade: good**

#### **4. Quality of management and leadership**

The manager was very new in their role as headteacher of the school. However, over this short period of time they had established close relationship with children and families. They clearly had a visual presence within the nursery which supported children and staff. This also meant she was able to observe staff practice and offer praise and guidance for continuous improvement.

The nursery engaged in support and challenge visits from the Local Authority Standards Quality Improvement Officer (QIO). This ensured that staff were given continued support to identify strengths and areas for improvement. Many systems and processes were beginning to evolve along with the introduction of new strategies to make sure there was a systematic approach to evaluation, reflection and assessment of quality.

Throughout the inspection, it was clear that the manager was inspirational, knowledgeable, motivated and determined with high but realistic expectations of herself, staff and pupils. We were confident that there was very good capacity for improvement in this setting.

**Care Inspectorate grade: good**

During the previous Care Inspectorate inspection, the setting had no requirements and one recommendation. From this, the one recommendation has been met. As a result of this inspection, there are no requirements and no recommendations.

## Explanation of terms of quality

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quality are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.