

Summarised inspection findings

St Mark's RC Primary School and Nursery Class

The City of Edinburgh Council

18 June 2024

Key contextual information

St Mark's Early Learning and Childcare Centre (ELC) is part of St Mark's RC Primary School in the City of Edinburgh. The ELC is managed by the acting headteacher. The centre has grown from a 35-place to a 110-place setting, located in a new detached building which opened in January 2023. A significant number of additional new staff have joined over the past 14 months.

This is due to the rapid expansion of numbers of children, the introduction of provision for two-year-olds, and the increase to 1140 hours. The acting headteacher, who holds a substantive headteacher post in a nearby school, had only been in post in St Mark's for two weeks at the time of the inspection. The centre is registered for 110 children attending at any one time, with a maximum of 30 children aged two years and 80 children aged three to five years. At the time of the inspection, there were 77 children on the roll, 15 of whom were aged two years and 62 children aged three to five years. The centre is open from 8am to 6pm each day and children access their 1140 hours in a wide variety of attendance patterns to suit family circumstances. The centre is staffed by two senior early years officers (SEYOs), three full-time early years officers (EYOs), two part-time EYOs, 14 early years practitioners (EYPs), four nursery assistants and two domestic staff.

1.3 Leadership of change

satisfactory

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

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

- The nursery team have recently refreshed their vision and values, in consultation with children and families, to make them meaningful and relevant to the new larger setting. All staff demonstrate the centre's vision of 'guiding hearts and inspiring minds' well in all aspects of their practice. They work in a caring and collaborative way with children, families and each other. Staff are highly committed to doing their best for children and have created a nurturing and supportive playroom environment. As a result, almost all children are happy, settled and secure. Staff have plans to involve parents and children more fully in nursery developments and in shaping decision making.
- School leaders involve the nursery team in whole-school developments and initiatives. SEYOs are caring, supportive leaders who understand the strengths of their team well. They have developed very strong and productive partnerships with families. They should enhance their monitoring of the overall quality of provision by working alongside playroom staff more regularly. All staff are self-motivated and willingly use their skills, interests and talents to take forward improvements. All practitioners have 'champion' roles where they focus on, and develop, a nursery area. For example, champions have developed the garden area and home corner. These champion roles now need to be more closely aligned with the priorities identified in the nursery improvement plan. They should be monitored to ensure that they impact positively on outcomes for children.
- Staff make some use of audits and checklists to identify strengths and areas for improvement. They now need to use a wider range of evidence to focus the nursery improvement plan more

effectively on areas which need to be developed and improved. Staff use a comprehensive quality assurance calendar which details proposed self-evaluation and monitoring activities. The calendar needs to be used more systematically to ensure that all nursery areas are regularly reviewed. SEYOs meet occasionally with school leaders to discuss learning, teaching and children's progress. These meetings should be more frequent, providing guidance and support for the team on how to measure the progress of developments. This will allow staff to document, evaluate and celebrate the impact of improvements. The staff team shows strong capacity for improvement but needs clearer direction and strategic leadership to support them to improve the overall quality of provision.

- Staff have benefitted from visits to other centres to identify and share good practice. They have used this knowledge, building on their own professional learning to develop new provision for two-year-old children. Although this is a recent development, staff have used their daily reflections to focus on developing experiences, spaces and interactions. This is at an early stage of development but has resulted in increasingly appropriate sensory provision for the youngest children. Staff recognise that they would benefit from further professional learning to develop the provision for children under three further.

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, confident and independent and engage well in activities in the playrooms. A majority of children focus for sustained periods of time on experiences that promote curiosity and investigation, particularly outdoors. Ongoing developments from the nursery team are leading to an improving playroom environment offering greater breadth across the curriculum. Staff should now provide resources which promote deeper learning within literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Many children are ready for more challenge in their learning.
- Interactions between staff and children are warm, caring and nurturing. Most children have formed positive relationships with their friends and interact positively with each other through role play and teamwork opportunities. Staff are highly responsive to children's play and help to extend their ideas by providing additional resources. They should now think about how to develop and extend children's interests through effective questioning and research activities.
- Practitioners make detailed observations of individual children and small groups during play, to assess their skills and progress across their developmental milestones. They share children's next steps with families using e-learning journals. Staff's tracking procedures take good account of both developmental milestones and national guidance on early level experiences and outcomes. Children who need additional support for learning are well supported through the use of specific assessments and individual educational plans. These include appropriate targets from partner agencies.
- Practitioners' curriculum planning takes good account of observations of children's interests during play. These are recorded for responsive planning purposes. Practitioners' intentional planning includes celebrations and festivals throughout the calendar year. Children's ideas and comments are captured in big books along with evidence of how the activity links to experiences and outcomes across the curricular areas. Practitioners record significant learning, which is personal to each child, in the child's e-learning journal.
- The senior leadership team could now consider further professional development on the role of the practitioner. This should aim to support staff to develop further the cycle of observation, planning, assessment and tracking. This will help to ensure greater breadth, depth and challenge in children's learning. Children will then be supported to develop their ideas, interests and learning in increasingly purposeful and creative directions.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning and developmental pathways

- The staff team plan experiences, across the four contexts for learning, which are wholly play based and linked to children's ideas and interests. They use age-appropriate, meaningful contexts to engage children and support their learning. While there is an appropriate range of play contexts indoors, there are too few high-quality resources and provocations to fully engage children. Outdoor spaces are richer and offer good opportunities for exploration, creativity and investigation. SEYOs recognise the need to provide experiences that will offer children greater depth and challenge in their learning.
- Practitioners have begun to develop their leadership roles to provide literacy and numeracy opportunities across the curriculum. They should continue to use self-evaluation to measure the impact of changes and developments to children's learning. In doing so, they could consider how the playroom and outdoor environment could promote early literacy and numeracy more effectively.
- Practitioners support children very well at transition points. When children start nursery, staff offer personalised arrangements to meet the specific needs of children and their families. The nursery offers enhanced programmes for children who find it difficult to make the transition from home. School staff offer a comprehensive transition programme to ease children gently and seamlessly into P1. SEYOs and practitioners are aware of the need to develop a collaborative approach across early level with P1 staff. This will help to ensure continuity and progression of the curriculum and children's learning.
- Practitioners support children to learn phrases and words in a variety of languages including Gaelic, Spanish and Polish. Children use Gaelic words to describe how they are feeling. They are supported to learn Gaelic vocabulary through the use of stories. Staff share Gaelic, Spanish and Polish phrases with home through digital newsletters. This is increasing parents' engagement with their children's language learning and is helping them in pronouncing new sounds and vocabulary.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on children and families – parental engagement

- Practitioners have strong relationships with families. They take regular opportunities to speak, both informally on a daily basis and more formally once a term. Families are invited to 'stay and play' sessions and open days which the centre promotes well within the community. Families for whom English is an additional language have been encouraged to read stories to children in their first language. Some are encouraged to share aspects from different countries and cultures.
- Staff ensure that they work effectively with other agencies such as health and speech and language therapy. The team engage with toothbrushing initiatives, Bookbug and the local library. Families receive regular communication and information through digital newsletters which are very popular.
- Parents speak very positively about their links with all staff. They feel welcome and included and believe their family circumstances are taken fully into account when planning to meet children's needs.

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 that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency 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

- Staff have created calm and welcoming environments for learning both indoors and outside. Children arrive eager to explore and show enthusiasm for new materials and play spaces. In daily conversations with their key worker, children talk about their friendships and their feelings, and are learning how to express their emotions. Staff actively support children to be kind and responsible and they use wellbeing language effectively in their everyday engagement with them. Playroom displays and resources could better reflect the wellbeing indicators and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This would help to embed the nursery's approaches to wellbeing. Children are learning to be independent as they prepare snack and help to serve lunch. They are developing social skills as they share food and chat together over meals. Staff support this well in their daily interactions. Children are learning about healthy eating choices and, with staff encouragement, enjoy trying different foods.
- Staff provide very good role models for children. They use visual prompts and the shared language of restorative practice consistently and effectively. However, a few children would benefit from support more appropriate to their specific needs, for example by using real life objects. Most children follow simple rules and routines and behave well. They are learning to resolve conflicts, with staff providing sensitive and well-judged support. Children who find it difficult to regulate their behaviour receive targeted support including personalised small, quiet play spaces.
- All staff are fully aware of statutory requirements in relation to early learning and childcare. They use local authority guidance appropriately to request support for identified children. They work in partnership with a range of agencies to access specialist support for the few children and families who need it. This ensures that children have sensitive support from staff who understand their needs. SEYOs should agree specific approaches to working with a few children who have complex needs. This will ensure they are supported consistently across all playrooms. The staff team offers a very high level of support to families, for example by offering attendance patterns which support parents' working shift arrangements. Moving forward, staff could involve children and families in creating appropriate personal targets which are specific and measurable.
- The nursery has a strong, compassionate and inclusive ethos and a strong sense of community. All staff support children who require additional help with their care or learning. Practitioners have an in-depth knowledge of children and their context, including the impact of the cost of living. They are fully aware of family circumstances and are alert to any potential barriers to learning which children may have as a result of social circumstances. Families whose first language is not English are fully included, with support from Edinburgh City Council's translation team of interpreters. Families greatly appreciate the nursery's community shop which offers a range of free food, clothing and toiletries to parents.

- Practitioners celebrate diversity well through a range of cultural festivals. They display world maps in the playroom and children have some awareness of the wide range of countries represented in the nursery. Several staff speak other languages and share these with the children. Staff are aware of the need to broaden the range of resources to celebrate age, disability, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion and belief.

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 aged two years are making good progress in all areas of their development. They enjoy investigating their playroom and the outdoor garden. They explore a range of sensory materials and are beginning to develop friendships and share materials.
- Children aged three to five years are making good progress in early communication and language. They are supported to learn new vocabulary through the use of visual materials and interesting books. Most children are 'mark making' with a few children able to do detailed drawings and write letters and words. More opportunities for writing and access to a wider range of texts would further support children's progress. Most children talk in sentences and ask questions. They can describe their play by commenting on construction models, discussing 'potions' in the water area and using new words they had learned about volcanoes. Staff have strategies in place such as using visual materials to support children with English as an additional language. These approaches also help those who require support with their language development.
- Children are making good progress in numeracy and mathematics. Most are confident working with numbers to ten. They demonstrate an understanding of quantity and are able to count forward and back. A few children can count beyond 20 and recognise number symbols to 20. A large group of children can count to ten in Spanish. A few children could describe their understanding of mathematical concepts and used appropriate terms to describe shape and structures. Most could understand expressions such as more than, heavier than and bigger than. Children's progress could be further supported by wider access to mathematical equipment and games.
- Children are making very good progress in health and wellbeing. They have opportunities to develop their emotions and responsibilities across different routines in the day such as tidying and helping at mealtimes. A few children are supported to regulate their emotions through the use of 'yoga cards'. Some children choose very challenging yoga techniques where they have to work together to demonstrate a position correctly and they are very skilled in doing so. Children's play outdoors supports investigation through loose parts play. They have access to the wider community where they can explore a local woodland area. Children engage enthusiastically in large physical play where they climb, balance and use wheeled toys. Families are encouraged to post wider achievements on the learning journals where children participate in clubs out with nursery.

- All children have made good progress since they started nursery. SEYOs are developing a revised tracking system which will demonstrate children's progress over time more accurately. This will enable effective moderation and planning for children's attainment. This knowledge of children's progress can then influence planning to ensure challenge and pace and depth of learning.
- Practitioners are inclusive and welcoming to all families and children. Children's different cultures and languages are celebrated using a range of resources including a visual map. This is developing children's awareness of themselves as global citizens. Practitioners who are bilingual make important contributions. They support children who have English as an additional language and help immerse children in learning new vocabulary.
- Children with additional support needs are well supported through the use of individual plans and regular meetings. Practitioners are aware of the challenges children and families face and understand their role in promoting equity and providing sensitive support and advice.

1.1 Nurturing care and support

Staff were responsive and caring towards children. Parents told us they felt supported by the service and that staff were warm, welcoming and friendly. Staff knew children and their families well and their approaches reflected families' preferences. This helped children feel secure, valued and respected.

At the time of the inspection, the nursery was trialling a new snack and lunch routine. Children were developing important independence skills by collecting and clearing their plates, self-serving their food and pouring their own water. Staff sat with children for most of the time which provided a role model to encourage positive eating habits and social interaction. Further consideration should be given to achieving high quality interactions throughout the full mealtime experience. This would provide rich opportunities to promote close attachment and develop relationships.

The service had water jugs available for children throughout the day. We asked the service to monitor and encourage children's water intake. This would support children to remain hydrated throughout the day and support good bowel and bladder health.

Children in some areas were supported to understand and express their emotions through a variety of resources and planned activities, including daily emotion check ins. As a result, some children were supported to develop their ability to understand and describe their feelings, which provided them with important emotional literacy skills.

Personal care routines and sleep times were carried out sensitively and promoted privacy and dignity. Staff had an effective system in place to monitor children whilst they slept. This helped children rest and recharge which supported their wellbeing and overall development. We asked the service to record room temperatures as part of their monitoring process and this was immediately implemented.

Staff worked well with partner agencies to provide additional support for some children. Strategies of support were in place for some children to enhance their communication development and emotional regulation. The senior leadership team should provide further support to ensure all strategies are implemented and used consistently. This would enable all children to achieve their full potential and develop lifelong learning skills.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: good

1.3 Play and learning

Staff held regular meetings to discuss children's experiences and reflect on opportunities to extend children's play and learning. Play experiences were recorded in a floorbook which identified activities and experiences and recorded children's voices. To further enhance this, the service should consider including next steps to extend children's interests. They should include how they can evaluate the planned next steps and record progress in children's individual play and learning. This would allow achievements to be identified and support children to reflect on their learning. (See area for improvement 1).

Planning approaches were responsive to children's interests. Children had opportunities to lead their own play and could choose how they spent most of their time. We asked the service to be mindful of interrupting children's play through planned group activities. This would support children to engage in deeper, meaningful play.

There were some appropriate resources and materials available to support learning for children. The staff had worked together to develop literacy across the nursery and we discussed how this could be further extended. Staff should now reflect on their knowledge of child development to enrich the provision and add resources to extend learning in all areas of the nursery. More focussed interactions and effective use of questioning to extend children's thinking, would support children to widen their skills and enhance their learning through play.

Children's opportunities for play and learning were enhanced through connections to their local community. We joined children and staff at one of their forest kindergarten sessions, where children enjoyed building dens and climbing. The service could consider developing this opportunity by extending it to younger children. Children enjoyed regular visits to the local library and parks which supported them to feel included in their local community.

Children's learning was supported through the celebration and acceptance of diversity. Staff were supporting children to learn phrases and words in a variety of languages including Gaelic, Spanish and Polish. We encouraged the service to review their resources to ensure they reflect and promote diversity. This would further enhance the inclusive environment they had created and demonstrate how children can learn how to value individuality and promote respect for others.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: good

2.2 Children experience high quality facilities

The setting was furnished to a good standard, well-ventilated with plenty of natural light, which created a welcoming atmosphere. Children were confident moving around the spaces available. This supported them to lead their own play and have fun with their friends.

Enthusiastic staff supported children to benefit from regular active play in the outdoors. Garden spaces had been structured to support all children to have access and opportunities to enjoy outdoor play. Children had been planting seeds and staff were supporting this learning by introducing new words and discussing the planting process. This supported children to maintain healthy active lifestyles.

Aspects of children's safety was promoted through risk assessments. Staff spoke with children about safety, which enabled them to benefit from a variety of activities that provided challenge and fun in a safe way. Some children were involved in the daily risk assessing of the garden. We discussed how this could be further extended to include other areas and the base used in the forest. We found a loose drain cover in the garden which exposed a deep hole. We discussed the risk with staff who had previously reported this but it had not been repaired. We supported the service to ensure a temporary measure was in place to ensure children's safety. The service provided assurance this would be immediately followed up and resolved. Due to the potential for significant risk we have made a requirement. (See requirement 1).

Some checks were in place to review resources available within the rooms. We discussed extending this to promote a reflective review, to consider how learning opportunities could be extended through developing the resources available. A wider variety of open ended resources including loose parts, would further promote children's curiosity, creativity and imagination. Further

development of the resources within the environment would enrich opportunities for children's play and learning.

Infection prevention and control practices allowed children to maintain healthy lifestyles. For example, we observed thorough hand washing during the inspection visit. We asked the service to ensure all areas had pedal bins to reduce the risk of germs being spread.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: good

3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well

All staff were dedicated and committed to the service. The senior leadership team had recently changed and the new team had the capacity to direct the changes and improvements required. The strong, positive ethos was reflected in the newly revised service vision. Opportunities were now required for the senior leadership team to work with all staff to develop a shared responsibility for continuous improvement.

To ensure outcomes for children are consistent, quality assurance approaches should be developed. The quality assurance calendar should be reviewed, to ensure audits of various aspects of the nursery are routinely carried out. For example, we found some accident forms had not been signed and staff were not always following the service policy for accidents. Quality assuring documents and processes would support consistent practice and ensure the service was managed and led well.

We asked the service to consider ways for staff to self-evaluate their practice and carry out observations of practice. This will enable staff to continually reflect on their practice in a way that supports their individual areas of expertise to be more widely shared across the setting. This would promote more consistent practice and empower staff to develop their own skills and knowledge.

Staff had taken on champion roles, which were individual areas of responsibility in areas such as outdoors, physical education and parental communication through social media. Some staff were able to speak confidently about their own professional development journey to enhance their lead areas and how this impacted outcomes for children. All staff should now be supported to engage in reflective discussions or professional learning to strengthen their area of leadership. This would enable them to show their commitment to continuous improvement and responsibility for enhancing children's play and learning.

Regular and purposeful communication took place with parents and carers. They used social media and monthly newsletters to communicate with families, and share photos of activities and experiences children had enjoyed in the setting. They had started to consider further ways to gather the views of families about the service. This should now be developed and extended to show how children and families' views are used to inform the development of the setting.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: adequate

4.3 Staff deployment

It was clear staff had developed positive respectful relationships with each other. The team were committed and actively took part in the inspection process. They worked well to create a positive

atmosphere and welcomed children and families into the service. This allowed staff to flexibly support each other and meet children's needs.

There was a plan in place to ensure staff positioned themselves within the playrooms to support effective supervision of children's play. Staff communicated effectively to maintain engagement with children as they moved around the spaces available. Positive working relationships enabled tasks to be shared to allow staff to be responsive to children's individual needs. Children were comfortable and familiar with all staff, and they were supported to freely and confidently access all areas in the service. This allowed children to feel safe and secure in the environment.

Staff told us they felt supported in the service. There was an induction programme in place to allow new staff to familiarise themselves with policies and procedures. We signposted the service to the ELC national induction resource to review their procedure. Creating a more formal induction and mentoring support for staff, would guide and enhance staff's understanding of their roles and responsibilities of being registered workers. This would support staff to continue to develop their skills for ensuring positive outcomes for children.

Most staff had taken part in annual appraisals, which provided opportunities for them to talk about their strengths and developmental needs. We discussed how this process could be further enhanced to ensure there were agreed goals and timescales. This would ensure staff had the appropriate support and allow them to evaluate and reflect on their progress.

There were regular opportunities throughout the week for staff to discuss children's needs and hold team meetings. Staff were invited to add items for discussion and notes from meetings were kept. The service should further develop this area to promote more reflective discussions and record any agreed actions. This would enable staff to evaluate and reflect on practice and support continuous improvement.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: good

During the previous Care Inspectorate inspection, the setting had no requirements and three areas for improvement. These three areas for improvement have been met. As a result of this inspection, there is one requirement and one area for improvement.

Requirements

By 30 April 2024 to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children, the provider must ensure the premises are safe. The outdoor environment should be free from hazards and the required repair on the drain cover should be addressed.

This is to comply with Regulation 4(1)(a) of The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/210).

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I experience an environment that is well looked after with clean, tidy and well maintained premises, furnishings and equipment'. (HSCS 5.24).

Area for improvement

To ensure children are supported to achieve, staff should develop the way they record and plan for children's learning. This should recognise significant learning and development as well as identifying how children can be supported in future. This should be responsive to children's needs and choices.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which states that: 'My personal plan (sometimes referred to as a care plan) is right for me because it sets out how my needs will be met, as well as my wishes and choices'. (HSCS 1.15).

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.