

Summarised inspection findings

Airyhall School Nursery Class

Aberdeen City Council

5 November 2024

Key contextual information

Airyhall Nursery is situated within purpose-built accommodation in the school. The nursery is in the west end of the city of Aberdeen. Almost all children attending live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation deciles six to ten. Children can attend the nursery from the age of three until starting primary school. The setting is registered to provide early learning and childcare (ELC) for 40 children at any one time. Currently there are 56 children on the roll who access ELC through a range of attendance patterns. The nursery is open 46 weeks during the year. Children can attend between 8.00 am and 5.57 pm to provide flexibility and choice for parents. The accommodation consists of a multi-purpose room used for dining and other experiences, and a large playroom that has direct access to a large enclosed outdoor area. Children also access additional areas within the school building.

The deputy headteacher has delegated responsibility for the nursery with the headteacher overseeing the strategic leadership. Two senior early years practitioners (EYP) are responsible for the day-to-day operation of the nursery. There are seven EYPs, two support workers and a modern apprentice.

1.3 Leadership of change

very 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

- The nursery shares the vision, values and aims with the primary school. The values were created in June 2020 and are reviewed annually with all stakeholders. These values are well embedded and clearly displayed across the setting. Practitioners model the values very well in their work and use relevant language effectively to support children to develop the values in their play. Children identify what each value means for them in developmentally appropriate ways and demonstrate them successfully as they interact in enjoyable experiences inside and outdoors.
- Led by the strong and effective leadership team, all practitioners are reflective and engage successfully in a range of self-evaluation activities using national guidance to improve practice. All staff engage regularly in professional dialogue to identify appropriate priorities to support continuous improvement. They take a solution focused approach to making changes. For example, to develop further an inclusive learning environment, practitioners regularly audit and evaluate the nursery space to ensure it meets the needs of all children.
- There is a strong sense of teamwork where practitioners value each other's strengths and experiences and work very well together to support improvements in pedagogy. For example, practitioners support each other effectively to develop the use of digital technologies. Children build their digital skills progressively and their learning is enhanced as a result. Practitioners now plan to develop the use of collegiate peer observations to support further the self-evaluation process.

- All practitioners engage fully in regular professional review meetings with senior leaders. Almost all practitioners contribute to and have a leadership role that has been identified in relation to the nursery improvement plan and practitioners' interests and skills. As a result of this leadership, all children benefit from well-planned and progressive outdoor learning activities. Parents are supported with ideas on how to support their child's learning at home through an effective parent programme. Practitioners access relevant professional learning which they share with the wider team to ensure consistency of approach. For example, their work on supporting children's emotional wellbeing is well-embedded and is supporting children very well to understand their emotions at an age appropriate level. Children have developed a range of effective strategies that they can use for support. As identified, practitioners should develop further, ways to evidence how these leadership opportunities are impacting on improved outcomes for children.

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

- Staff create a happy, welcoming and nurturing ethos which is supporting children to settle well in the new term. Children easily select from a range of resources to support their play ideas. The pace of the day allows children to have extended periods of time for free-flow play. As a result, almost all children are motivated and engaged in their chosen activities. Practitioners should continue to monitor the environment to ensure the core provision includes access to a range of messy play experiences to support all children's sensory needs.
- Practitioners have responsibility for key groups of children, and as a result, they know children very well. They understand the importance of positive relationships and have quickly established supportive, warm relationships with new children. Practitioners have a good understanding of child development. They are sensitive to the needs of individual children and the ways in which they can support their learning. Practitioners interact skilfully with children to scaffold learning and to extend children's curiosity. They give clear explanations to support children's understanding of routines and answer children's questions well.
- Practitioners support children effectively to use digital technology to support learning. Children use tablet devices well to take photographs and are confident in using programmable toys. Children use bar matrix codes independently to access their online profiles and upload posts to their profiles with support. Practitioners use the interactive board effectively to engage children in movement songs and to access games to reinforce previous learning.
- All children have an online profile that is readily accessible to parents. Profiles contain photographs, film clips and observations of children's learning. They comprehensively detail what learning looks like across a week for individual children. Practitioners use this information to identify what they will do next to support children's learning and development. As planned, senior leaders should work with practitioners to ensure that all observations of children's learning are of a consistently high quality and more fully record key learning and skills. Practitioners should identify and share next steps in learning with children in age appropriate ways to help them to have a better understanding of themselves as learners. They would benefit from moderation activity across other settings to further develop their confidence in making sound judgements about children's progress.
- Practitioners plan for children's learning effectively through a balance of responsive and intentional planning. Intentional planning takes account of seasonal changes, cultural and religious celebrations and identified gaps in curricular areas. Practitioners should develop their planning further to focus more clearly on the small steps of learning. This will support practitioners further to identify and address gaps in children's progress.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning and developmental pathways

- Practitioners plan the curriculum well using national guidance. This is based on play and linked strongly to children's interests. Practitioners use local authority progression pathways to inform their planning across all areas of the curriculum. These pathways support effectively children's learning and wellbeing.
- Practitioners provide a curriculum that is highly responsive to children's needs and interests. All children enjoy learning indoors and outdoors daily. In the outdoor area children are developing their curiosity and problem solving skills successfully using a wide range of natural and open ended materials. For example, children are developing their understanding of risk and safety well through building using loose parts play materials.
- Practitioners make good use of the local community to enrich learning for children and to develop skills in different contexts. Children visit the local shop to buy ingredients for baking and learn about how money is used to pay for goods. Children are learning skills for life as they grow fruit and vegetables in the garden and take part in baking experiences.
- Practitioners support children well as they start nursery and move to primary school. Children new to nursery have opportunity to visit nursery and key workers have dedicated time to speak with parents to gather information about children's learning and care needs. This helps practitioners to know the children well and to build trusting relationships with parents and children. There is a planned programme to support transition for children moving on to school. Practitioners and primary one teachers meet and share key information to support continuity of learning for children. This ensures that children are effectively supported to settle into P1 quickly.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on children and families – parental engagement

- Practitioners have good relationships with families and are available for daily conversations at drop off and pick up times. They make good use of digital platforms to share information with parents about children's progress and nursery events. They provide a range of activities across the year for children and families to learn together. This includes stay and play sessions and focused learning sessions to support parents to get ideas of how to promote and support learning at home. Senior leaders are beginning to gather data to show how this is improving outcomes for children. This will support practitioners to share with parents how their involvement is making a difference to their child's progress.
- Parents are invited to nursery to share their skills with children to enhance children's learning. For example, one parent helped children to make henna tattoos as part of cultural celebrations. Practitioners should continue to encourage parents to share relevant skills, the work they do, and their interests. This should further support practitioners to enhance and enrich children's learning experiences.

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

very good

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

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- Practitioners understand the importance of strong nurturing relationships to ensure wellbeing and place this at the heart of the work they do. They encourage parents to share wellbeing information about their child each day as the child enters the setting. As a result, practitioners support children's needs very well and children settle quickly to play and learning. Across the setting, there are very positive relationships between children and practitioners, based on trust and respect. This is a key strength of the setting. Practitioners support children effectively to be aware of their emotions and the strategies to use if they feel upset or angry. They speak sensitively with children and help them to identify how they can resolve issues. As a result, almost all children make good choices when they disagree with others and resolve issues between themselves the majority of the time. Children make good use of quiet areas to rest and relax and be offered support to manage their feelings. Practitioners model behaviour which promotes care and respect, and this supports children to interact positively and show consideration for others. Almost all children behave well and maintain positive relationships with each other almost all of the time.
- Senior leaders are mindful of supporting the wellbeing of all practitioners to enable them to provide for children's wellbeing. All staff meetings have time for a wellbeing check-in. This supports staff to feel valued and confident that they can receive support if they need it.
- Practitioners support children to feel safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included. Children talk about how to be safe, healthy and responsible when playing indoors and outside. Most children assess risk appropriately as they climb and run safely outdoors. Most children demonstrate their understanding of including others in their play. They are developing well an awareness of how their actions can affect the emotions of others. They understand the importance of making healthy choices at snack. All children benefit from unhurried, calm lunchtime and snack experiences. They develop their social skills well as they chat with practitioners and other children as they eat.
- Practitioners have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities regarding statutory requirements and their professional responsibility in fulfilling them. Regular opportunities for professional learning with regard to keeping children safe and well enable practitioners to keep their knowledge up to date. They meet with parents and other agencies to develop individual plans to support children who require additional support with their learning. These plans ensure that practitioners are aware of the individual needs of children requiring targeted support. As a result, children with additional support needs make good progress against their individual targets.
- Children learn and play in a highly inclusive environment. All children are supported well and access a wide range of developmentally appropriate learning experiences which is helping

them to make good progress. Practitioners support children very well to learn about the different cultures of children attending the setting. Children are ready to develop further their awareness of diversity and challenge discrimination through developmentally appropriate experiences.

3.2 Securing children's progress

good

This indicator relates to the development and learning of babies, toddlers and young children. It requires clear understanding of early learning and development and pedagogy. It reflects the integrated way young children learn and the importance of experiences and development happening on an individual basis within a supportive, nurturing and stimulating environment. High quality early learning and childcare contributes significantly to enhancing children's progress and achievement as they grow and learn. It can benefit all children by closing the attainment gap and ensuring equity for all. It is about the holistic nature of development and learning ensuring these foundations are secure in order to achieve future attainment success. The themes are:

- progress in communication, early language, mathematics, and health and wellbeing
- children's progress over time
- overall quality of children's achievement
- ensuring equity for all children

- Most children are making good progress in early language and communication. They listen attentively in different situations and remember and use information well, such as safety rules when out in the community. The majority of children draw recognisable pictures, and a few are beginning to add increasing detail to their drawings. A few children recognise their own name and are beginning to recognise and write some of the letters in their name. Children need to develop their early writing skills in more contexts and through exciting provocations in all areas of the nursery.
- Most children are making good progress in numeracy and mathematics. They know the number sequence to ten and beyond and they recognise familiar numerals in the environment. They are developing an understanding of the language of measure as they build structures with open-ended materials. They are learning about the use of money through visits to the local shop. As planned, across the year children should experience a wider range of mathematical learning in a range of contexts.
- Children's progress in health and wellbeing is good. Almost all children are increasingly independent in nursery routines and in their own self-care. Most children are developing well skills to recognise and regulate their emotions, and this helps them to play very well together. Most children are developing good fine motor control as they use utensils to help prepare and serve their own snack. They are developing gross motor skills through challenging experiences in the gym hall. In the outdoor area children use a range of open-ended resources to create structures to balance and climb and manage risks. Children should be supported to have greater awareness of their rights in developmentally appropriate ways.
- Across the nursery, most children are making good progress over time. A few children would benefit from greater challenge in their learning. As new systems to track children's progress are embedded, practitioners will be able to identify further where individual children could benefit from specific support and challenge.
- Practitioners record and share children's achievements in and out of the setting using an online learning journal. Praise is used effectively to build children's self-esteem and reinforce positive behaviour. Practitioners invite parents to share wider achievements from home through these online profiles. They should develop further strategies to track children's wider achievement with an increased focus on the skills they are developing. This will support children, parents

and practitioners to celebrate the good progress children make and help practitioners to identify children who would benefit from additional experiences.

- Practitioners have created an inclusive ethos where all children and families feel valued. They have a very detailed understanding of the social and economic context in which their families live. They sensitively ensure all children have equal access to all learning opportunities. For example, they provide outdoor clothing to ensure all children can access outdoor play in all weathers to ensure that no child misses out. They have created a book borrowing facility which allows families to access bedtime story books to support learning at home. Commendably, practitioners have worked in partnership with the local shop to provide a range of food items for families through the 'Food Share' initiative.

1.1 Nurturing care and support

Children experienced warm, caring and nurturing approaches that supported their overall wellbeing. Staff had built positive relationships with children and families which supported them in knowing the children well. Staff were kind, respectful, and provided comfort and reassurance to children. As a result, children were happy, confident, and settled in the service.

Children's dignity and privacy was promoted during personal care routines such as changing a nappy or visiting the toilet. Staff worked discreetly and sensitively with individual children to support their preferences. This helped children to feel respected and included.

Children were well supported by effective personal plans. Each child's personal plan was created in collaboration with families and where relevant, with supporting professionals. This promoted continuity of care for children. Plans included information and comments in relation to individual SHANARRI wellbeing indicators (safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible, and included). They contained the information staff needed to support children and meet their needs. Records were updated to reflect changes and progress. Staff had built positive relationships with children, and families and knew them very well. As a result, children were well supported in their overall wellbeing.

Mealtimes throughout the day provided opportunities for children to be independent and learn life skills. Children could choose what to have for lunch each morning from a set of options given. Snacks were served as part of rolling provision which meant that children could choose when to eat and recognise when they were hungry. Children took turns to help prepare for mealtimes with tasks such as chopping fruit or laying out tables. Staff used these times to build relationships and chat with children, further supporting their confidence and social skills. Staff supported children to develop skills in pouring, eating well, and talking to others. On most occasions staff sat at tables to maintain close supervision, safety, and support. Staff should find ways to ensure that a staff member is present at each table for all meals, including snack time.

Staff planned group times and learning approaches that successfully support the ongoing wellbeing of children. 'Learning together sessions' supported children and families to develop play skills, have fun together, get to know each other and make connections. Work was done to support children to identify and regulate their emotions and was incorporated into play materials, such as the use of colour monsters. Some use of Makaton supported a few children in their communication. This helped children feel included and supported them to achieve.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: very good

1.3 Play and learning

Children were having fun and were engaged in their play experiences. They had good opportunities to lead their own play and learning, in an environment that was inviting and stimulating. Children were confident in the spaces and were familiar with nursery routines. They had fun exploring the play spaces both indoors and outdoors. This impacted positively on their development and wellbeing.

Planning approaches for children's learning and the tracking of children's progress had been a key area of progress for the service. They were continuing to develop this further. A mix of planned

and spontaneous experiences was in place to support children's learning. Planned experiences took into account seasonal or annual celebrations such as fair-trade week. Spontaneous experiences were used to promote and encourage children interests and curiosities. Opportunities were available for children to be creative in their play and support children's curiosity through provocations and activities. Staff interactions and knowledge of child development enhanced children's learning and experiences. This supported children to feel happy and confident in their play and learning.

Children had opportunities to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. These included access to books and mark making activities and encouragement to count and recognise numbers. These opportunities could be further developed throughout the playrooms. For example, having focused writing areas and play invitations.

Children had access to a variety of experiences outdoors which included large-scale open-ended resources. Staff understood the benefits of regular outdoor play and we saw them supporting children with risky play. For example, climbing and jumping. This approach encouraged children to understand their own capabilities and develop confidence in how to be safe.

Children's learning and achievements were recognised through regular observations. These were recorded and shared with families using online journals. Most observations were individual to children's experiences and linked to learning outcomes from guidance. Some observations would benefit from more depth of learning. Staff should now focus on ensuring observations are of consistent quality to ensure children's progress.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: good

2.2 Children experience high quality facilities

Children accessed accommodation which was comfortable and well furnished. Indoors had plenty of natural light and was well-ventilated. Staff were mindful of maintaining warm room temperatures when doors or windows were open. This supported children to be cared for in a welcoming and well-maintained environment which supported them to feel important and respected.

Children moved freely around the different play areas. This supported children to choose where and how they would like to play. There were cosy spaces for children to rest and relax, supporting children's health and wellbeing. Toys and resources including natural materials, were organised to support children's choices and curiosity. Some play areas could be further developed and monitored to ensure continuous provision, such as paint and water play is readily available to children. Staff explained paint is available for children to self-select throughout the session.

Free flow access to outdoors was available for most of the day. Children enjoyed outside spaces and were well supported to dress for the weather, wearing outdoor coats, waterproof suits, and wellies. Outdoor play areas such as a sand pit, mud kitchen and construction blocks gave children opportunities to play and explore their ideas. Loose parts provided some opportunities for children to climb and develop physical skills, balance, and risky play. A planting area provided opportunities for children to explore nature and how to care for plants such as herbs, vegetables, and flowers. Some areas of play would benefit from an increased variety of resources and provocations to further enhance children's play and learning. Management and staff shared their plans to further develop outdoor play spaces.

Staff worked together to identify any risks and took actions to minimise these. For example, adaptations were made to the perimeter fence of the outside space to meet the safety needs of

individual children. Staff worked together and communicated well to ensure children were accounted for throughout the day. Children took part in identifying risk when going for a walk to the local shop. This meant children were cared for by staff who understood how best to keep them safe.

Staff implemented infection, prevention, and control routines to minimise the potential spread of infection. This contributed to keeping children safe and healthy. Children were aware of when to wash their hands such as after visiting the toilet, playing outside or before mealtimes. Children were not washing hands effectively when doing this independently. This put them at risk of infection. Staff should find ways to supervise and support children to be aware of the correct process to follow as described in guidance.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: good

3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well

Strong leadership within the service promoted a culture of continuous improvement. The leadership team were keen to encourage children and families to make contributions to initiate change and development. The management team were visible, friendly, and approachable to children, families, and staff. As a result, the team worked well together to continuously move forward in ways that benefited children's experiences.

A clear vision for the service was in place along with aims and Airyhall values. These were regularly reviewed by children, families, and staff. This helped ensure they remained meaningful to those attending. Staff practice reflected the setting's aims and values and were embedded in what they do. This meant children were cared for in a positive environment where they were supported to feel respected and nurtured.

Children and families were meaningfully involved within the setting and able to influence change. Conversations and the sharing of ideas were used to implement small ongoing changes to practice to meet individual children's needs. Formal opportunities for feedback were created throughout the year such as when evaluating the 'summer sizzler' event. As planned by the service this could be further enhanced by finding ways to gain more focused feedback on events or areas of provision. This will further embed evaluative practice and support children to feel included.

Children's outcomes were supported by a meaningful development plan. Areas identified for development were clear and relevant with all staff taking an active role and leading improvements. Staff evaluated their practice against national guidance documents and best practice. This resulted in planned changes which supported improved outcomes for children.

Quality assurance and self-evaluation work was established throughout the year. This allowed for key areas of development to be identified and carried forward. Staff reflected well together and used this to bring about positive change. A quality assurance calendar was in place that supported the evaluation of key areas of practice. Managers and staff used these approaches to highlight strengths and where any improvements or support were needed. This enabled the service to continuously move forward.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: very good

4.3 Staff deployment

The deployment of staff was managed well and effective to meet children's individual needs. Staff worked well together and spoke positively about teamwork. They felt relationships between team members was strong and felt very well supported by each other and the management team. This approach ensured there was a positive ethos between the team. This helped children and staff to feel safe, secure, and valued.

Children benefited from an enthusiastic and nurturing staff team that knew them and their families well. Across the day, staff communicated very well as a team. They had a clear understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities and deployed themselves effectively to ensure children were supported. Staff breaks were managed without disruption to children's care and learning. This helped ensure staff were rested, enabling them to support children throughout the day. As a result, children's sense of security and overall wellbeing was promoted.

The leadership team had recently recruited new staff to roles. The importance of hiring the right staff for each position was at the forefront of their decision making. Staff deployment had been carefully considered and took account of the differing experience, knowledge, and skills of the staff team. This ensured that children received consistently responsive care which met their individual needs.

Leadership at all levels was actively encouraged, the service had developed a positive ethos of distributed leadership. This supported staff to take responsibility for specific areas and develop leadership skills. This empowered staff to share their individual skills and knowledge. By building on existing strengths staff felt supported to further develop their practice and skills. Regular team meetings and staff training provided important time to reflect on their practice, learning and development. This meant that children benefitted from consistent high-quality experiences.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: very good

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.