

Summarised inspection findings

St Agatha's RC Primary School Nursery Class

Fife Council

17 March 2020

Key contextual information

St Agatha's nursery class, part of St Agatha's RC Primary School, is accommodated within the main school building. Children have access to a large, self-contained garden area from the playroom. Registration is for 48 children to attend at any one time and the setting currently offers AM and PM sessions. From January 2020, the setting will offer extended day places for 16 children. Refurbishment and extension of the accommodation took place over the summer of 2019 to support this. At the time of inspection, there were 33 children on the roll. Children may attend from age three to those not yet attending school. Children attend from the immediate area and catchment extends to the surrounding areas of Methil, Buckhaven, Windygates and Kennoway.

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

- The headteacher and practitioners have a shared and clear vision for the ongoing development and improvement of the nursery class. They have high standards and a drive to do the very best for children. The vision, values and aims reflect those of the whole school community with appropriate personalisation to reflect the nursery class. This includes parents being consulted and choosing two of the four school values, 'respect' and 'resilience', to underpin the work of the class. Practitioners recognise they need to use the language of the values more with children to ensure they develop their understanding. As the setting develops in the near future, practitioners should keep the vision, values and aims under review. This will help ensure these fully reflect the unique context of the setting and national guidance for early learning and childcare
- The headteacher and visiting staff from Fife Council support practitioners well. The nursery teacher provides a very positive role model to practitioners who welcome ongoing support and challenge in their practice. The early years development officer also provides welcome input in the development of aspects such as story sacks and supporting students. Together, visiting staff and practitioners are a reflective team who strive for continuous improvement. Practitioners are proud of improvements they have taken forward. These include redevelopment of the nursery garden following vandalism and improving the experiences of children at snack. The headteacher should manage the direction and pace of change more strategically and support an increasingly outward looking approach to maximise the skills of practitioners.
- Practitioners work very well together as a team. They welcome, and are enthusiastic about, opportunities for quality professional learning. Practitioners share their learning with each other and can identify confidently examples of how this has resulted in well-informed improvement. Positive examples include development of the learning environment to increase children's independence and strengthening parental engagement.

- Practitioners use self-evaluation well to reflect on what is working well and what needs to improve. Through questionnaires and discussions, the views of parents and carers are gathered, and where possible, acted on. Children evaluate aspects of their experiences, including what they have enjoyed about their learning and where they enjoy spending time in the playroom. Practitioners evaluate the impact of changes they have made using 'How good is our early learning and childcare?' They also use other helpful tools, such as audits to help them benchmark and measure the quality of provision including outdoor learning. Practitioners' extensive knowledge of the setting and their findings from self-evaluation need to inform more fully the improvement planning process. Practitioners need to identify specific, clear and measurable priorities to ensure increased pace of change, which impacts further on children and families. The headteacher and practitioners should identify key, pertinent and relevant priorities for the nursery class within the whole school improvement plan to support this.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

very 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 arrive for their session eager to engage and ready to learn. Practitioners provide a wide variety of well-resourced, high quality learning experiences both indoors and outside, which motivate and engage children very well. Practitioners ensure very good use of natural and real-life materials to support children's learning across the curriculum. The attractive, stimulating environment encourages children's curiosity and deep engagement as they play and work together. The setting's extensive outdoor area allows children to investigate, use their imaginations and enjoy exercise. Children enjoy greatly weekly visits to nearby woodland. Here they have freedom to explore the natural world whilst they run, climb and slide down slopes and explore the properties of ice and frost. Across the setting, children's learning experiences extend and sustain their interest. As a result, children are motivated to make decisions and choices. They lead their own learning independently and with confidence. For example, they read books to each other in the hideout, explore light and darkness with torches and create interesting structures with the hollow blocks.
- Practitioners ensure a welcoming environment for children and their families. They are caring and nurturing in their approach. As a result, children feel safe, secure and included. Practitioners interact skilfully and use questions and discussion to deepen and extend children's thinking and learning. They support children's curiosity very well and use a range of approaches to sustain children's interest across the wide range of learning contexts. Practitioners encourage deeper learning by supporting children to use the internet to research areas of interest. In this way, children and adults learn together as they develop their knowledge and skills.
- A key worker system is in place that ensures practitioners know children very well as learners. The team record carefully observations of specific learning and record these in children's personal learning journey folders (PLJs). These are highly valued by children and parents. Practitioners meet regularly to discuss children's progress and achievements. They have developed recently a system for recording next steps in learning. Practitioners assess and track children's communication skills. Using this information, they are beginning to plan additional support for identified children. They should now fully implement, as planned, a simple tracker to demonstrate children's progress across health and wellbeing, communication and early language and mathematics. Practitioners need to have an accurate overview of the progress of all children to help them identify cohorts of those requiring additional support or challenge.

- Practitioners use children's ideas and interests very well to plan learning across the curriculum. They use a highly effective learning wall approach to document what children know and what they would like to learn. In this way, practitioners ensure children's learning is relevant and deepens knowledge. Children revisit and reflect on their learning as the evidence of learning builds on the wall. They are confident in sharing their thoughts with others. Practitioners monitor and evaluate carefully the involvement of children as the interest develops. They also take forward the interests of individual children very well. Practitioners use stimulating approaches to encourage children to explore their learning in depth, for example, tracking the journey of a letter. This helps motivate children and encourages sustained involvement in their learning.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning and developmental pathways

- The curriculum offers stimulating and engaging opportunities for learning and is highly responsive to children's interests and needs. Practitioners use national guidance well to support planning for children's learning. They track coverage of curricular areas to ensure appropriate breadth of learning for children across the curriculum. They promote and develop successfully, the essential aspects of early learning including a strong focus on children's developing skills in wellbeing, communication, mathematics, curiosity, inquiry and creativity.
- The setting benefits from attractive and thoughtfully developed outdoor grounds to provide considerable potential for rich learning experiences for children. Children's weekly visits to local woodland help them to observe seasonal changes and the wildlife living in the trees. This supports their awareness and appreciation of the natural world.
- Children have a developing awareness of the world of work through planned learning experiences. They explore an interesting range of careers as they consider what they would like to do when they grow up and the skills they will require. To create progressive pathways practitioners should encourage parents to share their skills and knowledge required in their area of work.
- Pastoral transition arrangements support children's move to primary one very well. Children and teachers have good opportunities to get to know each other through a planned transition programme. The PLJs contain key information and achievements in learning across the curriculum. Practitioners share this information with the receiving teacher. This, together with clear evidence from tracking of progress, help to ensure ongoing progression through learning and development pathways. Practitioners and staff, working in the nursery class and school, need to work more collaboratively to deliver the continuum of the early level and ensure children experience greater continuity in their learning.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on children and families – parental engagement

- Parents are kept well informed about their child's learning and achievements. Practitioners are introducing a helpful online platform to support information sharing further and improve communication. PLJ folders are available to children and parents at all times and the learning partnership is supported by regular dialogue between key workers and families. Learning walls, opportunities to join visits to local woodland and events such as 'singalongs' support parents and carers to engage regularly in children's learning. Literacy based sessions and structured programmes extend opportunities for families to engage whilst empowering them to contribute to their child's learning. There is potential for practitioners to share their own professional learning with parents, for example information about schematic play.
- Practitioners make extensive use is made of the local community to support, motivate and extend children's learning. They respond to children's interests timeously, for example visiting a local shop to buy ingredients for baking. Other visits include the local recycling centre, local woodland, the post office and library. Visitors into the nursery include East Fife Football Club and oral hygiene specialists. Practitioners have begun to develop a link with a local care home for the elderly. They recognise the potential to build on this to promote increased opportunities for children to contribute to the wider community.

2.1 Safeguarding

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

very good

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

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- Practitioners promote wellbeing as a key feature of the setting. They are very positive role models and have high expectations of children. They recognise positive relationships, based on mutual respect and trust, as the foundation of wellbeing. Together, as a team they promote and nurture the creation of these. This approach supports children to settle quickly into the welcoming, relaxed ethos and environment of the nursery. Practitioners are sensitive and nurturing in a responsive and consistent way to the needs of individuals. Almost all children are happy and confident in the setting as a result. Most children play well together, share and take turns well. When required, practitioners support individuals to show consideration for others and to develop the skills required to self-regulate. Practitioners use praise very effectively to recognise children's positive behaviour and promote their self-esteem.
- Practitioners have created a strong sense of community where each individual and family is valued and their contribution viewed as important. This ethos supports children to be confident and play an active role in the setting. Approaches to getting it right for every child underpin the work of the setting. Children are developing their understanding of the wellbeing indicators of safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included. Practitioners are beginning to introduce the language of wellbeing to children in a developmentally appropriate way. They need to continue to support children to articulate their own thoughts and feelings about their wellbeing with confidence. Exploration of children's feelings, for example in relation to nightmares and being afraid of the dark, are positive examples of how practitioners have started to do this.
- Practitioners consult with children and ensure they are active participants in many decisions that affect them. This includes choices about the purchase of resources, creating snack menus and planning their own learning. Children show high levels of independence because of the enabled learning environment and are becoming confident individuals. During visits to local woodland, children apply their developing abilities in assessing and managing risk to keep themselves safe. They demonstrate resilience and perseverance as they tackle new challenges. Children assess confidently potential risks in the outdoor area to ensure the safety of others. Outdoors, children develop and consolidate skills. Examples include learning to balance and ride bikes, creating their own physical challenges with open-ended materials and mastering climbing to the top of the challenging climbing frame.

- Overall, senior leaders and practitioners have an understanding of the statutory duties required to deliver early learning and childcare. Practitioners understand the importance of keeping children safe and their role in ensuring that this happens. Together, senior leaders and practitioners are developing their understanding of the requirements of care planning. Practitioners know children and families very well which helps them to secure positive outcomes for individuals.
- Practitioners promote inclusion. They are skilled in identifying where a child may benefit from support with their learning. Children need to explore and celebrate diversity in meaningful ways to help them become aware of cultures, customs and ways of life in 21st century Scotland and beyond.

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 communication and early language. They are attentive when they choose to listen to a story and can follow instructions. When sharing their learning experiences children use a good range of vocabulary. Most can recognise their name as they self-register on arrival. A few children are becoming aware of the language and layout of books and can talk about the author and the illustrator. Children need to develop further their awareness of early reading concepts, for example by introducing them to rhyme and letter sounds. Most children show a keen interest in early mark making. A minority are able to write their name and letters that are important to them. They are developing their awareness of the purpose of writing when they use recipes and make lists for shopping trips.
- Most children are making good progress in numeracy and mathematics. They count to ten with increasing confidence during play and a few show good number recognition skills as they recognise numbers in the environment. Most children use mathematical language appropriately in their play. In the woods, they use positional language to talk about their place in the line. They are beginning to understand the concept of time when they use the sand timers. A few are interested in the hands on the clock face and understand this is how we know what time it is. They use money to pay for items of food from a local shop. Children experience measuring as they weigh the ingredients to follow a recipe to make Christmas cakes. They need to develop further and apply their developing skills in real-life and imaginary contexts.
- Most children are making good progress in health and wellbeing. Children are caring towards each other and are developing friendships. They are confident following the nursery rules and routines. Children are developing independence through preparing and collecting their food and clearing their dishes at snack. They have a good awareness of how they can support their own health and wellbeing. They know how to keep themselves safe as they follow the rules in the woods and when out for walks in the local community. Most children are developing good fine motor control and can demonstrate this through using a variety of writing tools, scissors, threading and at the woodwork bench. They demonstrate high levels of confidence and resilience during physical activities such as climbing trees and rolling down slopes. Children need to develop further their skills in a progressive way, for example at planned gym times.

- Overall, most children are making good progress over time in most areas of their learning and development. They are gaining confidence and are developing as independent learners. Practitioners have a good knowledge of the differing cultural and socio-economic backgrounds of children and their families. Practitioners promote equity by beginning to use assessment information to identify children who need additional help, for example in acquiring and understanding language. Practitioners need to develop how they use available data effectively to plan and appropriately deliver targeted interventions for all children, as individuals or as cohorts.
- Practitioners plan and use a range of strategies to ensure no child is at risk of missing out. Practitioners review and adapt any strategies implemented, constantly reviewing how successful they are at ensuring participation by removing any potential barriers to learning. This is helping most children to make good progress in their learning
- Children's individual achievements are recognised, captured and celebrated well. They demonstrate pride in their achievements, particularly when discussing displays on the learning walls and in PLJs. Children are becoming confident individuals. They contribute enthusiastically and with responsibility to enterprise activities such as baking Christmas cakes to sell at the school fair. As a next step, practitioners should focus on a wider range of skills for children to develop. They also need to encourage parents further to share their children's achievements from home. This important link with home will encourage all concerned to help progress children's learning further.

1. Quality of care and support

Caring and nurturing attachments had been formed between the staff and the children. Children were happy and confident and led their own play using a wide range of quality resources on offer within the playroom. For example, children spent a long period of time in the dark den using torches and taking part in quality conversations. Children also spent an extended period at the playdough area discussing how to create the correct consistency. Staff used a restorative approach to support children to resolve conflict independently and were responsive to their needs by discussing emotions and feelings with them. This resulted in confident children, who had opportunities to develop their curiosity, creativity and resilience in an enabling environment.

Personal learning journals told a story of each child's learning and progress through observations and photographs. The children were keen to show us the photographs within their folders and shared their learning experiences, which included baking, dressing up and learning more about occupations. However, the learning folders were inconsistent, and did not all include completed all about me forms. These forms should be completed and include all relevant information when each child starts attending the nursery and should be reviewed at least six monthly. This would ensure that each child's needs could be fully met to a high standard.

The playroom had free flow access to a well-resourced and secure outdoor play area. This area included a wide range of loose parts to encourage curiosity and imagination, raised beds for planting and growing and construction opportunities to develop creative play. The children also spent time at Letham Glen, a local woodland area. Children took part in a variety of play experiences, which involved assessing risks and discussing how to keep themselves safe. For example, a child climbed up a tree and then asked for help from an adult to safely jump down. Children made choices about which areas of the Glen to access and developed their imaginations and explored the natural outdoor environment. These outdoor opportunities developed problem solving skills, independent thinking, co-working, active lifestyles and developed their awareness of how to keep themselves safe from harm.

Snack was a valuable social experience for the children. Their independence and life skills were developed through pouring their drink, serving up their healthy snack option and washing their dishes. Children chose snack options, which they bought at the local shops or ordered and delivered. As discussed, this experience could be available for children throughout the whole session to provide the opportunity for children to choose when they wanted to eat or have a drink.

Care Inspectorate grade: very good

3. Quality of staffing

An enthusiastic and motivated staff team have undertaken a range of training opportunities including Solihull Approach, schemas and delivering a quality curriculum. This training had developed knowledge and skills and impacted on practice. The staff also had a good knowledge of current best practice documents and shared their reading and learning with each other. These training opportunities have resulted in reflective practitioners who were keen to continually improve learning experiences and outcomes for children.

The staff were skilled at extending children's learning using appropriate questioning and prompts. For example, children were asked; 'what makes water freeze?' and 'what do you think you could add to the playdough to stop it being sticky?' This questioning resulted in children developing their problem solving and thinking skills to extend their play and learning and support achievement.

Staff have taken on leadership opportunities to develop parental engagement, the outdoor area and the snack experience. Staff have used best practice documents to support their leadership within the development of these areas. Enabling further leadership experiences would support ongoing improvements within the nursery and would empower the staff and develop their confidence and self-esteem.

Several groups have been developed to involve parents in the life of the nursery, which include Bookbug sessions and PEEP groups. The staff reflect on these groups and gain feedback from parents to develop and enhance these groups to meet the needs of current families. Staff have also developed learning links with home through creating story sacks, story spoons and a lending library. This has resulted in learning at home which can be shared through photographs and comments from parents within the children's individual learning folders.

The staff were passionate about their high-quality learning walls, which focused on children's interests and questions. The team supported the children to display their comments, artwork and photographs to show their current knowledge and how this would be extended. The staff developed links within the local community and contacted local groups to support the children interests. The learning walls showcased the wide range of child led learning experiences and provided the children with the opportunity to share their high-quality learning experiences with others.

The team would benefit from the introduction of peer support. The staff could observe each other's practice and interactions with children, which would result in them sharing good practice as well as areas for development. This opportunity could develop professional dialogue and reflection to further enhance quality interactions and experiences for children.

Care Inspectorate grade: 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%