

Summarised inspection findings

Alphabet Yard

South Ayrshire Council

9 September 2025

Key contextual information

Alphabet Yard is a private nursery located in the town of Ayr. The nursery works in partnership with South Ayrshire Council to provide 1140 hours of early learning and childcare. It operates from 8 am to 6 pm for 51 weeks of the year. Children aged from six weeks up to primary school age access full-time and part-time sessions. The nursery is in a traditional two-storey stone building. It has two playrooms downstairs for babies and toddlers, and two playrooms upstairs used by older children. There is a secure outdoor play area which is accessed by all children. Recently, there have been significant changes in staffing and a new manager has been appointed. The staffing consists of the owner, a manager, three senior practitioners, six practitioners, two student practitioners, a modern apprentice, an administrator, a cleaner and a cook. The owner, manager and seniors work closely together to lead the nursery.

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 aged under three

- Children benefit from warm, caring relationships with practitioners. They enjoy playing with a rich variety of sensory resources and are developing confidence as they explore in the playroom and outdoor area. Practitioners know the children well as individuals.

Children aged three and over

- Practitioners ensure a strong focus on children's rights and create a caring, supportive ethos where children thrive. They support children in learning about their rights in a meaningful way. As a result, children show a sound understanding of their rights and talk about what their rights means to them. Practitioners work closely with children to develop a meaningful set of 'golden values'. Children talk and sing about these values and demonstrate very positive behaviours. They are happy, settled and show care and kindness towards each other.
- Relationships throughout the nursery are positive and nurturing. Children are relaxed and happy as they engage for extended periods of time in an interesting range of appropriate experiences. They have time and space to follow their interests and develop creativity and curiosity in the playroom and outdoors. Children are interested in learning and make choices about what they want to do. They benefit from well-planned trips to the beach and local community that supports them to develop important skills for life. Children use an interactive whiteboard well to practise mark-making and to play number games. As planned, practitioners should consider further ways to use digital technology to extend children's learning.
- Practitioners know all children well. They understand how young children learn and interact sensitively to support each child. They use praise effectively to celebrate and value children's achievements. A majority of practitioners use supportive commentary and thoughtful conversations to encourage children to talk about what they are doing. However, there are

missed opportunities, where practitioners should interact more effectively to help children to recognise and extend their learning. The manager should continue to work with practitioners to promote a greater focus on deepening and extending children's learning.

- Practitioners provide helpful daily updates on children's experiences for parents and meet regularly with them to discuss individual targets for children. They encourage families to become involved in children's learning by taking part in interesting home-link experiences. Throughout the nursery, practitioners observe children during play and record useful information in online journals. This provides information for parents about the activities that children are doing. However, practitioners' observations do not record consistently what children are learning or the progress they are making. Senior leaders should as planned support practitioners to have a greater focus on capturing and recording children's significant learning. This will help them to create clear and well-considered targets for individual children.
- The manager recently introduced simplified planning formats to support practitioners to have a clearer focus on children's learning. This new planning approach is at a very early stage and is not yet embedded. As planned, the manager should continue to support practitioners to strengthen their approaches to planning.
- Practitioners use individual trackers well to monitor children's experiences across the curriculum. This is starting to help them identify any gaps in children's learning. Practitioners provide appropriate support when they identify individual children experiencing barriers to their learning.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

- The setting 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.

3.2 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 under three

- Children under three are happy and settled in their playrooms. Babies have formed close bonds with practitioners and are developing confidence. Children benefit from trips to the beach and local pet shop where they learn about caring for pets. Younger children are becoming increasingly independent at mealtimes and show well-developed skills as they help themselves to food and clear plates.

Children aged three and over

- Most children make good progress in early language and communication. They follow simple instructions and talk clearly to each other and practitioners using sentences. Children engage with books in various areas of the playroom and outdoors. A few children recall their favourite stories and ask peers which books they like to read. Children enjoy listening to adults retelling familiar stories regularly. The majority of children demonstrate an awareness of rhyme through play situations. Children should be supported to continue to practice mark-making in meaningful, real-life contexts.
- Most children are making good progress in numeracy and mathematics. Children use their skills indoors and out to measure the length and height of various objects. They count in sequence during everyday situations such as lining up, climbing the stairs and playing games. Children are learning about volume and capacity as they play at the 'water wall'. Practitioners should now extend and deepen children's learning in all areas of numeracy and mathematics.
- Almost all children are making good progress in health and wellbeing. They develop social skills and independence well during regular outings in the community, exploring the local beach and pet shop. The majority of children express their feelings appropriately and follow nursery rules and routines. Children demonstrate their gross motor skills in the outdoor area as they climb and balance on their 'assault course'. All children run, jump and balance with confidence.
- Across the nursery, most children are making good progress over time. They are becoming confident individuals with a positive attitude to learning. Children are kind and caring towards each other and understand the importance of the 'golden values'. They are proud of their leadership roles and talk about their responsibilities. For example, children take turns as the 'garden safety officer' checking exits are secure and the area is safe to use. A few of children would benefit from additional challenge, ensuring that learning builds on what they already know.

- Senior leaders and practitioners know their families well and have created a nurturing and inclusive ethos. They work well with other agencies to support children with barriers to learning.

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.