

Summarised inspection findings

St Mary's (Leith) Primary School Nursery Class

The City of Edinburgh Council

19 August 2025

Key contextual information

St Mary's (Leith) RC is a primary school nursery class in the north-east area of Edinburgh. The nursery has two large playrooms and a large, enclosed outdoor space. It is situated in the main school building. At the time of the inspection there were 28 children on the roll which is the maximum number that can be registered for the service. Children aged between three and those not yet attending primary school can access 1140 hours of early learning and childcare (ELC). The nursery class operates in term time only. Children can attend 8.30 am to 3 pm Monday-Thursday and 8.30 am to 12.30 pm on a Friday.

The headteacher has overall strategic responsibility for the nursery class. Currently, an early years officer, five part-time early years practitioners and an early years assistant make up the nursery staff team. There have been significant staff changes in the nursery over the last 12 months.

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

- Practitioners have created a welcoming and inclusive ethos where children feel valued, respected and supported in their play. Children regulate their behaviour well and show respect and kindness to their peers and adults. Practitioners have developed positive relationships with children and their families. This results in practitioners knowing children well and responding appropriately to most children's needs.
- Most children are independent and confident in their play. They engage well in activities in both playrooms. Children would benefit from more opportunities for high-quality activities using loose parts to develop their creativity and curiosity. Children engage well in the outdoor environment. They choose to spend time outside exploring the varying experiences and opportunities, such as the climbing frame and riding bikes. This helps to develop their gross motor skills. Children are developing their skills using digital technology. They access digital devices regularly to play mathematical games and take photographs.
- Practitioners' interactions with all children are nurturing, caring and warm. They understand the importance of strong, positive relationships and know children's circumstances well. Practitioners sensitively support children. Most practitioners ask open-ended questions and scaffold children's learning well. They spend time with children to re-visit and talk about their learning. This supports children to understand the progress they are making and recognise their next steps. Practitioners should continue to develop high-quality interactions to help provide challenge for those who need it.
- Practitioners assess and evaluate children's learning using a 'focus child' approach and observations. They use this information to help identify children's strengths and progress. This

is recorded in children's learning journey folders. Children have access to these to review their play and learning. Learning journey folders are regularly shared with parents. Practitioners should continue to ensure children's next steps are relevant to the child. For example, focussing on one particular aspect of learning or skill to make it achievable.

- Practitioners ensure there is a well-considered balance of intentional and responsive planning. They use individual children's interests to inform their planning well. Practitioners use a local authority tracking tool effectively to record children's progress in literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing, and developmental milestones. Senior leaders and practitioners monitor and discuss children's progress regularly. This helps to identify children who need support or challenge in their learning. They should continue to build on this positive practice to ensure all children are making continuous progress. For example, ensuring children with English as an additional language have appropriate plans in place to support and develop their communication skills.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

- 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.

3.2 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 engage well in singing nursery rhymes with actions. Children listen to each other and are respectful and kind in their interactions. They follow instructions well and ask questions to extend their knowledge and thinking. Children are confident and fully understand the routines of the nursery day. Children mark-make and create detailed and articulate drawings. Children would benefit from opportunities to apply their mark-making skills in an increased range of nursery areas and outdoors. This should help to extend further their early writing and fine motor skills.
- Overall, most children are making very good progress in early mathematics. They explore and investigate measure, such as comparing size and weight. They use positional language during play, such as on top and under. Children show a growing understanding of time and seasons. They are highly motivated to learn about using a clock to tell the time. Almost all children recognise a range of simple colours and shapes. Most children count well in sequence during their play. A few children recognise and explore larger numbers. Children should continue to practise and apply their mathematical knowledge and skills regularly through meaningful experiences.
- Children are making good progress in health and wellbeing. They are beginning to learn and understand about their rights. Most children understand the importance of good hygiene routines, such as handwashing. Children show increasing gross motor skills as they run, jump, swing, balance and problem solve outdoors. Children demonstrate their understanding of wellbeing using characters, such as Safe Sam and Responsible Ricky, during their play. They would benefit from further experiences outdoors in their local community and other natural environments.
- Practitioners record and monitor children's progress in learning over time effectively. Overall, most children demonstrate good progress across the curriculum. A few children would benefit from individual strategies to support their social skills and confidence. Practitioners should explore meaningful and consistent ways to track progress over time, as a team. This will help to identify children who require further support and children who need more challenge.
- Staff provide children with lots of praise and recognition. Children are proud to see their achievements are recorded and celebrated on a special tree display in the nursery. They enjoy talking about their successes with others, such as learning to ride a bike and using gentle hands when playing with their friends. Children also share achievements from home and talk

about these confidently in small groups. Practitioners' thoughtful approach to personal achievement supports children to feel valued and recognise their strengths.

- Practitioners know children and their families well. They understand individual circumstances and use this knowledge well to address any barriers to learning. Practitioners signpost helpful supports for families, such as information about financial benefits and grants. They also offer help with food and clothing for families facing difficulties, through partnership with school staff. Senior leaders and practitioners support families sensitively and their approaches are helping to promote equity.

1.1 Nurturing care and support

Children's wellbeing was supported as they experienced warm, nurturing care from staff. Staff used language that gave children the message that they were valued and respected. They used their knowledge of children's home experiences to provide care that reflected children's individual preferences. As a result, children were settled and engaged.

Mealtimes were sociable and safe experiences. Staff sat with children providing effective supervision and promoting friendly, social interactions. Children could talk about the foods they enjoyed and shared their understanding of making healthy choices. Mealtimes provided children with good opportunities to be independent and develop their skills. For example, they collected their own cutlery and self-served their food. Children were familiar with the mealtime routines, which helped create a relaxed, unhurried experience.

Personal plans held key information that enabled staff to meet children's care needs. This promoted a continuity of care between home and the setting. Personal plans and learning journey folders were reviewed with parents. This enabled them to provide further information as required and gave them opportunities to discuss their children's needs and progress with staff. Staff could discuss the support strategies in place for individual children and overall used the strategies in practice to support needs and preferences. However, there were opportunities to enhance personal planning approaches by ensuring all children had identified strategies detailed within their plans. To further support children's wellbeing and learning, staff should further develop and consistently implement targeted support strategies for all children within key areas of their care, play and learning.

Staff were knowledgeable about children's individual health care needs. As a result, when children required medication, this was safely managed. Staff could describe the symptoms children would experience and were clear on what action to take. This helped to keep children safe and well. Overall, information was recorded effectively. However, we highlighted that further clarity could be added on consent forms to ensure it was clear medication would be given as required. For example, in the event of an allergic reaction.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: good

1.3 Play and learning

Children were busy and engaged in their play. They could follow their own interests as they explored the indoor and outdoor environments. Children enjoyed a range of activities, including role play, stories, puzzles, arts and crafts and water play. Resources such as scales, measuring tapes and clocks supported children to develop numeracy skills. Overall, the range of play options encouraged children to extend their imagination and learn as they played.

Within the outdoor space, children were having fun and developing skills, such as sharing and negotiating with each other. Resources such as bikes and soft play blocks supported children's physical development. Many children were proud of the new skills they were learning when using these resources. While children were engaged and having fun, there were opportunities to further promote creativity and curiosity across the setting. For example, children could benefit from staff developing the use of loose parts and open-ended materials. Moving forward, staff should further

reflect on the play and learning environments to enhance children's experiences and provide greater challenge within play.

Staff responded to children's play with enthusiasm, providing resources and discussions that supported interests and needs. This approach showed children that their play was valued. To enhance children's learning, staff could widen the use of effective questioning to provide greater challenge.

Planning approaches were responsive to children's interests and life experiences. Staff listened to children's ideas, observed their play and used information from families to plan a variety of opportunities. As a result, children were engaged in their play and learning.

Children had individual learning journey folders where staff recorded observations of activities and experiences. These folders were accessible to children and families, enabling children to have a sense of pride in their progress and achievements. Recorded observations were beginning to evidence children's current and emerging skills. However, at times they were not always specific enough in identifying the significant learning taking place, including next steps. To ensure all children are supported to reach their full potential, the setting should continue to develop the information recorded to ensure targeted strategies are identified and consistently implemented for all children.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: good

3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well

The senior leadership team demonstrated a strong vision, with a key focus on children, families and staff feeling nurtured and supported. This shared vision positively informed practice. As a result, children and families experienced a warm and inclusive ethos. Parents were welcomed into the setting at arrival and collection times and during other activities such as stay and play sessions. These practices gave parents regular opportunities to speak with staff, helping the development of positive relationships and effective communication.

The setting had developed an improvement plan, which identified key priorities to support improvement. For example, a focus on numeracy within the improvement plan was having a positive impact as children had good opportunities to explore numeracy through their play. As a result of these focused priorities, improvements were being made.

Some quality assurance processes were in place and targeted specific areas. For example, a core assurance toolkit guided staff to ensure personal plans were reviewed regularly in line with expected timescales. Some other quality assurance processes were less robust and could be further developed to support consistently positive outcomes. For example, children did not always experience high quality facilities. While daily checklists were used to assess some areas of the environment, these processes were not always effective in monitoring the quality of the environment. As a result, some play resources and furniture were tired and areas such as toilets and sink units needed redecoration. The senior leadership team should further develop quality assurance processes to ensure that all areas of practice and provision are monitored so that improvements are continually identified, actioned and sustained (see area for improvement).

Staff had opportunities to reflect together and at times used these reflections to improve outcomes for children. For example, they had reviewed the lunch time experience and visited other settings to gather ideas on routines. As a result, children experienced relaxed and engaging mealtimes. Furthermore, during a recent review of the snack menus, staff had taken account of current good

practice guidance. This helped to ensure snacks were balanced and healthy. Moving forward, staff would benefit from more opportunities to self-evaluate and reflect on the quality of the provision and children's experiences. For example, opportunities to further reflect on and improve the quality of the environment could help staff to ensure it is as comfortable and inspiring as possible.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: good

Area for improvement

To ensure that there is a culture of continuous improvement, the provider should strengthen the approach to quality assurance. This should include, but not be limited to, ensuring processes are developed and implemented to monitor and improve the quality of the environment and enhance children's play and learning experiences.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes' (HSCS 4.19).

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.