

**HMIE**

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland
Luchd-sgrùdaidh an Rìgh airson Foghlam ann an Alba

Summarised inspection findings,

Stromness Early Learning and Childcare

Orkney Islands Council

26 May 2026

HM Inspectors gathered evidence to enable us to evaluate the ELC's work using three quality indicators from the Quality Improvement Framework for the Early Learning and Childcare Sectors. This document provides our summarised findings.

Key contextual information

Stromness Early Learning and Childcare is located within Stromness Primary School but is managed by its own manager. In addition to the manager, staffing includes a senior early years practitioner and five early years practitioners. Orkney Islands Council provide overall management, and the nursery is supported by the Council's early years operational manager and service manager. The nursery accommodation includes a spacious playroom with direct access to a large outdoor area overlooking the sea. The nursery is registered for 40 children aged from two years to those not yet attending primary school. No more than 10 children can be aged two. Currently, the nursery has 28 children attending. Most children access their 1140 hours by attending from 9.20 am to 3.20 pm, from Monday to Friday during term time. A small number of 'early bird' children arrive at 8.30 am to meet the needs of working parents. These children, who attend for longer hours each day usually attend for only four days each week.

Curriculum	very good
This quality indicator highlights the importance of placing the needs, interests, rights and progress of children at the centre of curriculum design and implementation. <u>Curriculum</u> is defined as the totality of all that is planned for children from ELC, through school and beyond. It emphasises that children are entitled to a curriculum underpinned by the <u>principles of curriculum design</u> and enriched through meaningful learning experiences indoors, outdoors and within the community. It recognises the need for all children to experience opportunities to develop the interests, knowledge, skills, and attributes they will need to adapt, thrive and achieve in today's world. This quality indicator also recognises the importance of the curriculum supporting progress in children's learning as they enter the setting and at key points of transition. The themes are: • curriculum rationale and design • continuity and progression in the curriculum • partnerships • skills for life and learning	

- The curriculum is firmly based on the nursery's vision that all children will be 'nurtured to learn in a safe, fun, happy environment.' Staff ensure all children receive a rich, well-balanced curriculum, which fully promotes children's voice and builds upon nurturing relationships. Staff have documented their curriculum, which is based on a comprehensive rationale developed in partnership with children and families. Staff appropriately refer to national and local guidance in developing the curriculum. Staff consistently build on what children know and can do, supporting continuity and progression in their learning. The manager is thoughtfully reflective in developing children's learning. She regularly evaluates the impact of new curriculum developments to ensure that they improve outcomes for children. She has convincing plans which will ensure that all children are fully challenged in their play experiences. A next step in developing the curriculum would be to develop children's understanding of their rights.
- Staff have developed a stimulating, richly resourced outdoor area offering a wide range of exciting and engaging experiences. These include a well-equipped mud kitchen, an obstacle

course and the 'beach'. The indoor playroom offers dynamic sensory spaces which are full of imaginative and unusual, stimulating resources. As a result, children are curious, highly motivated and creative in their play. Children benefit from regular gym sessions which include dance, sports, gymnastics and yoga. Parents support the nursery's nature group by working with them to develop the Millennium Woods. Staff keep families very well informed of developments to the curriculum through workshops for parents and carers and stay and play sessions.

- Staff make very good use of the local area and its facilities in order to enrich the curriculum. For example, they visit the beach, the lifeboats and the fire station. Children are developing intergenerational links through weekly visits to Hamnavoe House, a local centre for elderly residents. These visits are extremely well planned by the children, with a focus theme each week involving children in joint sports activities, games, and craft experiences with the elderly residents. Staff provide a range of opportunities for children to develop skills for life and learning, for example by using money in local shops, growing vegetables and recycling. Staff support children very well to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding of the world around them, through real life relevant contexts. Children learn about road safety as they walk to the local woodland area. All children have some access to digital technology to support their learning. Staff have plans to use their recent training on film making to develop simple animations with the children. The manager is beginning to take effective steps to extend digital learning across the nursery.
- Children starting nursery are very well supported through home visits, welcome videos and highly flexible settling arrangements. Staff work collaboratively with colleagues across the early level in the primary school to ensure all children experience a high-quality transition. Nursery staff meet with P1 teachers to share a comprehensive early level transition report. As a result, continuity and progression in children's learning are well-supported.
- Staff encourage and empower all children to voice their views and make connections across their learning. Children benefit from opportunities to develop their leadership skills, for example as snack helpers and recyclers. Staff involve children fully in decision making for nursery improvements. For example, they recently discussed their 'dream' nursery environment, with children's ideas fully reflected in the changes which followed.

Learning, teaching and assessment	very good
This quality indicator focuses on how children benefit from access to high quality spaces and well-established routines that help them feel secure and ready to engage. It explores how children are supported to build positive relationships, regulate their emotions, and purposefully participate in a wide range of motivating learning experiences. It demonstrates the importance of staff having a high level of skill supported by strong pedagogical leadership. This includes a clear understanding of pedagogy, the concept of play, how children learn, children's rights and children's behaviour. It places value on high quality relationships, consistent expectations, and skilled interactions that enable children to sustain engagement, follow routines, and build independence in their learning. This indicator highlights the importance of observing and interacting sensitively with children to plan and assess their learning. It recognises the value of involving children fully in planning their learning indoors, outdoors and within the local community. This quality indicator emphasises the importance of robust tracking and monitoring of children's progress to ensure practitioners know all children very well as learners. The themes are: • children's learning and engagement • interactions to support learning • planning and assessment • tracking and monitoring	

- All staff demonstrate warm and nurturing relationships consistently. These approaches result in children who are welcomed with warmth and care into an inclusive environment. Children are happy, motivated and deeply engaged in their play. Almost all concentrate for extended periods of time and play collaboratively with other children. The well-organised and richly resourced indoor and outdoor spaces support children very well to explore, investigate and develop their creativity, imagination and problem-solving skills. All children are developing their understanding of a broadening sense of place through regular trips around the local area.
- Staff have developed very positive and supportive approaches in their interactions with children. The nursery ethos is unhurried and relaxed. This approach encourages children to explore and extend their interests with confidence. Clear and consistent routines are very well embedded across the nursery. Staff support all children very well to be calm and settled during times of transition throughout the day. For example, children independently undertake hand washing and toothbrushing routines and show respect for their play areas during tidy up times.
- Staff are very good role models for children and support them very well to be considerate and show kindness towards each other. Staff's skilful interventions enable children to acknowledge others' feelings, helping them to sustain their play and follow their interests calmly. Almost all staff show skill in using well-timed, open-ended questions and explanations to enrich children's learning.
- All staff undertake leadership roles, for example in nurture, health and baking and cooking. This commitment has supported the setting well to develop approaches to learning and

teaching. Staff now need to enrich learning further by developing a wider range of experiences in digital technologies.

- The manager has developed effective approaches to planning and assessing learning. These approaches are highly responsive and take very good account of children's interests. Staff use their 'Project Planning' to develop a range of learning opportunities linked to Curriculum for Excellence. For example, a recent focus on pets has supported both adult-initiated and child-centred planning. This takes very good account of children's ideas and how they want to develop their interest. Staff individualise aspects of planning to ensure that it remains responsive to children's new ideas as they build on their learning. The manager uses a planning tracker meaningfully to ensure that children cover the full range of early level experiences across all curriculum areas.
- Staff know and understand children and their families very well. They use information from home well, to plan individual learning programmes for children. Staff use ongoing assessment information from observations and interactions with children. This supports targeted planning and ensures children make appropriate progress towards identified learning and developmental milestones. Staff capture learning in children's profiles and use floorbooks to build a comprehensive picture of each child's progress and personal learning journey.
- Tracking and monitoring systems are robust, purposeful and embedded. Assessment of children's milestones is consistent and accurate. The manager makes effective use of planned progress meetings and regular moderation of learning targets. This helps to ensure staff provide tailored support for identified children. Moving forward, the manager could work with staff to increase their confidence in planning and recording children's next steps in learning. The manager monitors group plans and children's learning journals effectively. This supports staff to enhance learning areas and plan targeted group activities and individual interactions to address and support gaps in learning and progress.

Wellbeing, inclusion and equality	very good
This quality indicator highlights the importance of positive relationships and children's wellbeing. It recognises the importance of providing high quality, inclusive, and appropriate rights-based support. These approaches result in improved outcomes for children's learning, wellbeing and participation. It takes full account of children who may require additional support to access and benefit fully from their entitlement to high quality ELC. This includes identifying and assessing their learning and wellbeing needs in a timely manner and providing personalised and targeted support. This quality indicator recognises that strong, collaborative partnership working between those supporting children is essential. It highlights the importance of meaningful engagement with children and families to inform decisions about how children's needs should be met. This quality indicator emphasises the important role senior leaders play in ensuring all staff have relevant and worthwhile professional learning to meet the diverse and sometimes complex needs of children. The themes are: • positive relationships and wellbeing • universal support • Identifying and assessing learning needs and targeted support • inclusion and equality	

- Staff place high importance on wellbeing and have very positive relationships with children and their families. Relationships are based on respect, honesty and trust and the staff team is committed to meeting every child's needs. They actively listen to children and value them as unique individuals. Staff use a worthwhile range of strategies to help children understand and manage their emotions. These strategies include the use of puppets and age-appropriate stories. All staff have undertaken training in emotional coaching. This has enabled them to create a nurturing playroom where wellbeing is the focus and secure trusting relationships are prioritised. Displayed around the playroom, children's family photographs help them to feel connected to home and very safe and secure. Snack and lunchtimes are relaxed, sociable and unhurried, with children supported to prepare and serve their own food to build their confidence and independence.
- Children play exceptionally well together and understand the impact their actions have on others. They show care and concern for each other and share and cooperate very well. Staff are highly responsive to children's views and encourage them to express their thoughts and feelings. Staff include children in decisions that affect them. For example, children have authentic influence over their learning spaces. Staff provide all children with the support they need to be fully included. Staff regularly undertake further training to meet the very specific needs of a few children. They ensure all children have meaningful learning targets which they review regularly with families. Staff refine targets regularly to ensure they are manageable, firmly based on assessment information and that progress is measurable. They work sensitively with families to maximise the benefits of early learning and childcare for each child.

- The manager has a very clear understanding of potential barriers to learning. She works very successfully in partnership with a range of external partners to ensure that children and families benefit from their specialist guidance and support. The advice offered by agencies is well incorporated into children's plans. Staff use a range of observations, assessment approaches and their knowledge of how children learn to help them identify the individual needs of children. They work very closely with families to agree strategies and approaches to offer support to children who need additional support for their learning. They record detailed individual plans and review these regularly. At appropriate times, staff use specific targeted approaches to support individuals. The manager is proactive in seeking advice and guidance from other professionals such as psychological services. The manager also helpfully signposts families to other agencies who can offer support and resources.
- The manager has extensive knowledge of the community including its socio-economic, cultural and linguistic context. She uses this information to respond sensitively with appropriate support. Staff celebrate some seasonal events but could promote further diversity to help children develop their understanding of concepts such as fairness and equity. These experiences should encourage children to explore, create and connect with the world beyond their immediate personal experience.

Safeguarding

- 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.

Practice worth sharing more widely

The nursery's intergenerational links are outstanding. Children visit Hamnavoe House each week to engage with elderly residents. This is very well planned by both staff and children. Each week focuses on a different theme such as sports, crafts, old toys, music or games. Children engage in activities alongside residents and both children and senior citizens learn together. Children are learning important skills as well as empathy as they learn to adapt their planned activities to take account of residents' differing needs and capabilities. Residents report that the visits from the children are the highlight of their week. Children develop their spoken language as they engage with older adults and enjoy sharing their ideas with them. This worthwhile project allows children to contribute to their local community in a meaningful way.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard HMIE 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.

On behalf of His Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland.