

Summarised inspection findings

Dalry Primary School Nursery Class

Dumfries and Galloway Council

7 October 2025

Key contextual information

Dalry nursery is located within Dalry Primary School in the village of St John's Town of Dalry, Dumfries and Galloway. The service provides early learning and childcare (ELC) places for children living in the village and surrounding areas. Children can attend from the age of three until starting primary school. The setting is registered for 20 children to attend at any time. Currently there are 19 children on the roll, with 16 attending each day. Not all children use their full nursery entitlement, and a minority have split placements with other nurseries or with a childminder.

Almost all children attend between 9 am and 3 pm Monday to Friday, during school term time. There is one playroom and an outdoor garden area. Children do not have direct access to the garden area or toilets due to building constraints. Practitioners need to accompany children to toilets located out with the playroom. Children do access the outside area every day. The newly appointed acting headteacher has overall responsibility for the quality of learning in the nursery. She also has leadership responsibility for another primary school. She is supported by a nursery manager, a full-time practitioner and a part-time practitioner.

1.3 Leadership of change

weak

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

- Senior leaders and practitioners created the vision, values and aims of the nursery in 2020. These underpin the nurturing ethos within the setting and support children to feel welcome and respected. The nursery is rightly reviewing and updating their vision, values and aims. This will ensure that they reflect the unique, relevant needs of the children and families within the current community.
- The nursery manager prioritises being visible and accessible to staff and parents. She takes meaningful steps to influence better outcomes for children and their families. The nursery manager and acting headteacher should now take prompt action to clearly plan and direct the pace of change and improvements across the nursery more effectively. This will help to accelerate the success of improvements and have a positive impact on children's learning.
- Practitioners are enthusiastic about improving outcomes for children. They have welcomed recent opportunities to lead aspects of the work of the nursery, including the plan to introduce woodwork experiences into the curriculum. Senior leaders should now support staff to take on leadership roles linked to strategic improvement. This will continue to increase practitioners' leadership skills and create positive changes to improve children's experiences.
- Children have a few opportunities to demonstrate their leadership skills. They enjoy being snack helpers, taking turns to organise carefully their daily snack experience. Practitioners should now increase children's leadership opportunities by identifying a wider range of meaningful responsibilities for them to lead. This will increase their opportunities to develop confidence and a sense of responsibility.

- The nursery manager has established a basic approach to quality assurance that outlines an annual calendar of operational tasks and activities to be completed. Senior leaders now need to ensure that quality assurance leads to a more consistent level of high-quality practice across the nursery. They should create formal records that outline how statutory duties, frameworks and important policies are being fulfilled and embedded by the whole team.
- All practitioners are at the early stages of understanding the significant role they play in influencing and leading improvements. Over time, they participate informally in self-evaluation 'Black Book' conversations and identify basic improvement priorities within the nursery. For example, they recognised the need to improve the nursery garden and outdoor learning. Senior leaders should now promptly ensure that the improvement priorities for the ELC are linked to significant areas that require improvement. All practitioners need to become familiar with self-evaluation frameworks. This will support them to implement and lead a culture of continuous improvement within the nursery.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

weak

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 warm and nurturing ethos in the nursery. The team value the children and their families and are kind and caring in their interactions. As a result, relationships are positive and respectful. Most children enjoy nursery, settle confidently and are ready to learn.
- Over all practitioners are positive role models for children and encourage them to care for each other. They interact sensitively with children and help them to make choices about where they want to play. However, too often staff miss opportunities to extend and challenge children's thinking. Senior leaders should ensure all staff receive the right level of support to develop their open-ended questioning skills to support and extend children's learning. This should lead to improvements in the quality of interactions between children and practitioners by encouraging deeper thinking and shared sustained play.
- Practitioners do not yet formally plan or evaluate the range of interactions, experiences and spaces they provide across the nursery. They acknowledge the interests of a few children and build on them by providing interesting provocations and spaces to learn. They use loose parts and interesting resources creatively to enhance the majority of spaces. A minority of children engage well in their play and benefit from opportunities to develop their imagination and make links in their learning. To develop this further, all children would benefit from increased adult direction and support to extend their learning and develop their skills across the curriculum. Practitioners should focus on increased support to build on children's emerging literacy, language and numeracy skills more effectively.
- Children have a few opportunities to explore digital technology through their play. They are invited to play early maths and numeracy games on the interactive board. Practitioners should now increase children's access to a wider range of digital technologies to extend and enrich their learning across the curriculum.
- With the support of the local authority, senior leaders urgently need to develop a clear overview of all children's individual progress. Practitioners do not yet use robust assessment approaches to make informed decisions regarding children's progress. Over the week, practitioners make short, focused observations of a few children during play. They record children's experiences and interactions using photographs and comments in paper journals. These are available for children to access throughout their day. However, children do not yet routinely access the journals to help them to talk about their learning. Practitioners should now make better use of children's journals to help children to lead their learning and celebrate their talents and successes. To further develop the quality of observations, local authority officers should support practitioners to focus on identifying and recording the skills children are learning. They should consider how their observations and interactions with children can influence the

planning of learning. This should ensure observations and professional judgements are robust and provide reliable information to inform planning.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning and developmental pathways

- Practitioners provide a range of interesting interactions, experiences and spaces that encourage children to learn through play. They should now use Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and local authority guidance more effectively to support how they plan for children's learning. This should lead to increased opportunities for all children to experience a broad curriculum that develops well their knowledge, skills and attributes.
- The nursery manager leads a programme to support the effective transitions for children as they move into primary school. This is successfully supporting most children to become familiar with the school environment, other children and staff.
- Senior leaders should now explore ways for practitioners and staff across early level to develop the curriculum. They need increased opportunities to moderate and develop a shared understanding the early level curriculum. This will ensure judgements are robust and that children make the best possible progress.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on children and families – parental engagement

- Senior leaders and practitioners know families well. They value opportunities to build purposeful partnerships with them at the beginning and end of their daily nursery sessions. They offer stay and play sessions for parents and children twice yearly. These are well received by parents.
- Practitioners make effective use of the skills and talents of parents and groups within the community. Children have benefitted from show and tell visits that have increased their knowledge of animals and gardening. For example, they had a visit from a bee-keeper which helped to develop children's deeper understanding of the life cycle of bees and their value to the eco-system.
- Practitioners engage with a few local partners within the local community well. They work together regularly to support purposeful ways to improve outcomes for children in the nursery. For example, their successful partnerships with local businesses has led to improvements in the garden. To further enhance partnerships and collaborative working, senior leaders could now consider ways to involve partners in improvement planning for the nursery. This will create a shared sense of responsibility for ensuring children have the best possible opportunities to develop a range of skills.

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 that need to be addressed as a matter for urgency.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

unsatisfactory

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

- There are major weaknesses in this aspect of the work of the nursery. The acting headteacher, supported by local authority officers, needs to take prompt, structured and well-planned action to improve approaches to ensuring wellbeing, inclusion and equality. They need to ensure that all staff comply with their statutory duties to improve outcomes for children.
- Practitioners have developed positive relationships with children and families. The majority of children settle quickly and enjoy being at nursery. Parents value the warm welcome children receive from practitioners.
- Children are at the early stages of developing awareness of their wellbeing. They have fun learning about the importance of keeping safe on the rope ladder and swing in the garden. Practitioners encourage them to be kind and share resources with their friends sensitively. This is beginning to develop their social skills over time. All children now need more frequent opportunities to explore how they are feeling across their day in nursery. This should include learning about the national wellbeing indicators through meaningful play contexts. Practitioners need to help children to use and understand the language of the indicators to encourage them to talk about their wellbeing.
- Children benefit from a healthy, unhurried snack experience. They enjoy eating with friends and develop well their independence skills as they serve their fruit and pour milk. Children do not experience quality lunchtimes. They are often left unattended when eating and wait for extended periods of time to receive their food. Practitioners should now review the lunch experience to reduce waiting times and ensure practices adhere to national guidance. This will help children to develop lifelong healthy eating practices.
- Senior leaders and practitioners must ensure that they implement national and local practice guidance urgently. Currently, children who require additional support with their learning do not have the required individualised planning in place to support their potential progress. Local authority officers must take immediate steps to support practitioners to identify all children who would benefit from additional support with their learning. Working with parents and relevant partners, they should develop robust plans with clear focused targets. Senior leaders and practitioners should review these plans regularly in collaboration with parents. This will ensure all children benefit from the necessary support to make appropriate progress in their learning and development.
- All practitioners know of their statutory responsibilities in relation to early learning and childcare. The majority have first aid, child protection and food hygiene qualifications. They are all registered with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). The nursery manager meets with parents to develop a personal care plan for each child when they begin their nursery

journey. They gather information relating to children's care and support needs. However, staff do not always record accurately or act upon the information. Senior leaders and practitioners should take urgent steps to ensure all significant information relating to the care and wellbeing needs of all children is accurate and relevant. This should ensure that their individual needs are met and that they are supported effectively to overcome potential barriers to their learning and development.

- Practitioners should develop ways to raise children's experience and understanding of diversity through exploring different cultural celebrations. They should provide a wider range resources and stories that celebrate diversity and challenge stereotypes. This should develop ways to help children understand and respect a wide range of differences, including those out with their immediate experience.

3.2 Securing children's progress

weak

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

- In early language and communication children are not making sufficient progress. Almost all children require greater levels of challenge to help them develop their skills effectively. A minority engage in short conversations with their peers while describing their drawings and construction models. A few listen attentively to their friends and predict what will happen next in familiar stories throughout their day. A few children would benefit from targeted support to increase their confidence when talking in small groups. Children experiment with mark making and use pencils appropriately at the writing table to illustrate their ideas. A few children's drawings are very detailed, and they choose to engage for extended periods of time. However, children need supported to develop and build on their language and communication skills more effectively through their play. Children are ready to re-tell their own stories, explore environmental print and mark-making through real-life contexts.
- In early numeracy and mathematics children are not making sufficient progress. A minority are developing their confidence when counting within numbers to ten. A few regularly explore two-dimensional shapes through their focus on construction resources, naming squares and rectangles. They explore basic concepts of filling and emptying using jugs at the water station. They build sandcastles outdoors, problem-solve and explore weight concepts. All children now require planned, targeted adult support to make links between their play and the mathematical language and skills they are developing. This will help them acquire new skills and make better progress in all areas of early numeracy and mathematics.
- In health and wellbeing, children are making satisfactory progress. They co-operate and turn take well when waiting to wash their hands. A few demonstrate kindness and consideration when their friends are upset or needing help. The majority develop their fine motor skills when using modelling dough, mark making or using scissors. Children are making limited progress in developing their gross motor skills through energetic play when they visit the gym or the garden. Practitioners should ensure children have daily opportunities to develop gross motor skills through energetic, large physical play.
- The limited range of children's documentation and data available does not demonstrate clearly progress children are making in their learning over time. Senior leaders should take steps urgently to gather a wide range of significant assessment information focused on children's learning and achievements. Staff should develop robust approaches to review regularly children's progress and to identify appropriate interventions. This will help to ensure all children are making the best possible progress. As planned, practitioners should now consider ways to

celebrate children's achievements from nursery and home. This will increase children's confidence in learning and develop their sense of achievement and pride.

- As a matter of urgency senior leaders and practitioners should ensure plans are in place to support all children who may require additional support in their learning and development. This will help identify where children may benefit from more targeted support or challenge to make the best possible progress.

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.