

Early learning and childcare (ELC) setting shared inspection report

Meldrum School Nursery Class

Aberdeenshire Council

10 February 2026

In November 2025, a team of inspectors from HMIE and the Care Inspectorate visited Meldrum School Nursery Class. During our visit, we talked to parents/carers and children and worked closely with the manager and staff.

Key inspection findings

- Children who enjoy creating and re-telling stories, imaginative play and exploring nature in their wildlife garden. Staff provide a wide range of experiences that support all children to make good progress in early literacy.
- Children were cared for by experienced and motivated staff who worked well together. However, improvements should be made to ensure staff are effectively deployed to ensure children receive consistent and high-quality care at all times.
- Staff, parents and visiting professionals who communicate effectively to implement agreed, effective strategies for children with additional support needs. This supports children well to play alongside their friends and develop at their own pace.
- Children's well-being was supported through effective personal planning and collaborative approaches with families and other agencies. This led to high quality care and support for children.
- Children were offered nutritious meals and snacks. However, improvements should be made to ensure children consistently experience calm and unhurried mealtimes with high quality interactions from staff.

HM Inspectors and the Care Inspectorate gathered evidence to enable us to evaluate the setting's work using four quality indicators from [the Quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors](#).

Quality Indicator	Evaluation
Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment	good
Learning, teaching and assessment	good
Nurturing, care and support	Satisfactory/Adequate
Children's progress	good

Summary of inspection findings

Key contextual Information

Meldrum School Nursery Class includes two large playrooms and a small outdoor area. This area was very recently extended and is still under development. The setting is open all year from 8 am to 6 pm and children access morning, afternoon or full day places. The roll of the nursery is 65 with new children due to start throughout the year. A maximum of 56 children can attend at any one time. The early years senior practitioner, working with the headteacher, has overall leadership responsibility for the nursery. The team includes 14 staff who work on a variety of shift patterns across the week. An early years senior practitioner, three early years lead practitioners, nine part-time and full-time practitioners and a support worker complete the team. Children also have access to the school gym and grounds, library and a quiet room with sensory materials.

Leadership: Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

We evaluated this quality indicator as **good**, where there were important strengths within the setting's work and some aspects which could benefit from improvement.

Children were cared for by motivated staff who were committed to ongoing professional development. Staff maintained meaningful records of their learning and used this to develop a clear learning action plan. They benefitted from a range of training and development opportunities which led to improved outcomes for children. For example, staff who had completed training in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) were able to share how this was used to support children's learning.

Staff were well supported by leadership through annual appraisals, supervision, and regular team meetings that encouraged reflection and shared learning. This led to improved outcomes for children and families. Staff were well supported by leadership through annual appraisals, supervision, and regular team meetings that encouraged reflection and shared learning. This led to improved outcomes for children and families. The Quality Improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors: early learning and childcare should now be used to drive continued progress and development.

Staff took ownership of improvement initiatives and led the development of key areas within the nursery. For example, the development of the sand and music areas created inviting spaces where children enjoyed playing.

Staff were registered with a professional body and followed the codes of practice. This led to positive outcomes for children and families.

Children were cared for by a mainly consistent staff team. Staff enjoyed working together and felt that they complemented each other's strengths. Staff absences were minimal, and staff were flexible in helping out and covering when needed. This led to consistent care and promoted positive relationships with children and families.

Most staff were experienced practitioners, many of whom had worked at the service for a number of years. They worked well together and formed a strong team. Newer and less experienced staff were well supported by their colleagues who modelled good practice and provided support and help to others. Staff shared responsibilities and took turns to support children in their personal care, playing outdoors or when having snack. This helped create a welcoming atmosphere and contributed to a positive ethos.

Staff ratios were met and there were enough staff supporting the children for most of the day. Staff breaks were well timed and did not impact on children's experiences or supervision. However, towards the end of the day, staff were not always effectively deployed to provide children with high quality interactions and consistent caring approaches. Approaches to ensure children are provided with high quality care and supervision at all times should be reviewed.

Children play and learn: Learning, teaching and assessment

Staff provide a welcoming and inclusive ethos for all children and their families. Children are caring towards their friends as they help one another gather the materials they need to make their playdough. Children who are very new to the setting benefit from the consistent routines and expectations. Staff support them effectively to begin to share space and resources with other children. Most children listen carefully as staff skilfully use visuals and stories to engage children in large group sessions throughout the nursery day. Most children would benefit from regular time in smaller groups with a familiar adult. Senior leaders should now work with staff to review the frequency and effectiveness of large together times for all children. This could allow staff to plan smaller, more focused group times that minimise interruptions to children's play.

Staff use their knowledge of individual children and their families to quickly establish positive relationships. The team's approach supports well most children to form strong, trusting relationships with staff. Key members of staff apply their professional learning effectively to develop and improve most areas of the curriculum. Staff motivate and engage children in creative design and problem-solving activities as they invent and play board and action games they make. Children develop their own ideas in imaginative play for extended periods of time in their shop and home corner. Most children learn to take turns and play alongside or with their friends cooperatively in line with their stage of development. Children with additional support needs engage happily alongside other children as a result of appropriate focused activities with staff. A few children benefit from

appropriate support and guidance as they learn to respect other children's feelings and rights as they play together. Most children would benefit from support to sustain their engagement in their own learning towards the end of the day. A few children enjoy working together to play digital games, are proud as they take photographs or programme a toy to follow their directions. As planned staff should now increase experiences that use technology to build on children's skills and deepen their learning and understanding.

The team use the experiences and outcomes from Curriculum for Excellence, combined with seasonal events and children's interests, to influence their planning of learning. Staff have improved the balance of responsive and intentional learning across most areas of the curriculum. Senior leaders should continue to ensure they help keyworkers to focus on children's skills and stage of development in addition to their interests. In a few examples, staff focus too often on their planned experience, rather than on what children already know or can do. The majority of children would benefit from increased opportunities to contribute to, and lead, improvements in their learning.

All children are proud of their 'yellow books' that contain regular detailed observations about children's learning and where they have experienced success. Staff observations include a variety of curricular areas including science, art and early literacy. Children, parents and staff highly value these accessible books and revisit them regularly. Staff make effective use of their observations to inform useful progress meetings with the senior practitioner. A few staff now need to ensure all next steps for all children are specific and measurable. This will ensure all records of children's learning illustrate better what children can do and need to learn next. Staff working with children with additional support needs use appropriate assessment tools, observations and dialogue with parents and visiting professionals to agree specific, appropriate, measurable and achievable targets. All keyworkers and senior leaders are diligent as they populate a wide variety of records, spreadsheets and trackers. The team should work together to review and ensure the wide range of records, spreadsheets and progress overviews they contribute to for all children is achievable in the time they have available.

Children are supported to achieve: Nurturing care and support

We evaluated this quality indicator as satisfactory/adequate where strengths just outweighed the weaknesses.

Children were cared for by kind staff who were warm in their interactions. Most staff were responsive to children's needs and children were provided with cuddles and comfort. Children who required first aid were helped to recover and feel better by patient and caring staff. Children's achievements were celebrated, reinforcing self-worth and creating a positive, nurturing atmosphere.

Staff were caring and supportive when helping children with personal care. Towards the end of the day, however, some reminders about clothing or toileting were given from across the room, compromising children's dignity. Approaches to ensure children are provided with consistent high quality care across the day should be reviewed.

Children's safety was prioritised through attentive staff and effective use of the Care Inspectorate's SIMOA campaign (Safe, Inspect, Monitor, Observe, Act), helping children to understand safe play. Transitions between activities, such as moving to the hall or wildlife garden, were well managed to maintain safety. However, a robust risk assessment for the newly developed outdoor area had not yet been completed. The manager agreed to address this promptly.

Children's well-being was supported through sensitive arrangements for rest and relaxation. Safe, cosy spaces, including the newly developed library area, provided opportunities for quiet time and shared stories with staff. While book areas were available in both playrooms, one was less inviting, and playroom closures towards the end of the day reduced options for tired children. To ensure children always have access to high-quality, comforting spaces, the manager agreed to make changes to ensure consistent, high-quality provision across both playrooms.

Children were offered nutritious and appetising meals which most children enjoyed. Alternatives were offered when children did not like their meal, and allergies and food intolerances were catered for. Opportunities to help prepare snack and cut up fruit promoted children's independence, self-help skills, and responsibility. However, children did not always experience relaxed and calm mealtimes. The rolling format for High Tea, designed to maintain uninterrupted play, led to some disruption when individual children were playing in the snack area or staff needed to attend to parents arriving. This meant staff did not consistently sit with the children, limiting the opportunities to chat, socialise and keep children safe (see area for improvement one).

Children were kept safe and well by knowledgeable staff and effective procedures in the safe administration of medication.

Children's well-being was supported through effective personal planning. Parents and carers were fully involved in the process, enabling staff to understand each child's needs, personality, and interests. For a few children, an additional support plan and risk assessment was in place. Children and families transitioning into nursery were supported with settling in visits tailored to meet their needs. This helped children settle quickly and feel secure. When necessary, other professionals shared information and worked with staff to improve children's care. This meant children received consistent, individualised, high-quality care and support. Strong connections with families impacted positively on children's' experiences. Children and families were warmly welcomed and families told us staff were approachable and friendly. This contributed to confident children who were happy

to attend the setting. Other ways to involve families in the setting included Bookbug reading sessions, monthly newsletters and play and stay open sessions. A digital story telling app was used in an innovative way to inform parents about their child's learning and any new initiatives in the setting. This led to a positive and inclusive ethos where everyone felt valued.

Areas for improvement

To support children's wellbeing and development, the provider and manager should ensure children consistently experience safe, calm, and nurturing mealtimes. This should include but not be limited to:

a) providing children with the supervision, support, and care to meet their individual needs at mealtimes.

b) Ensuring children eat High tea in a calm and relaxed environment.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'If I need help with eating and drinking, this is carried out in a dignified way and my personal preferences are respected' (HSCS 1.34).

Children are supported to achieve: Children's progress

Children are motivated and increase in confidence as successful learners as they role play their own stories with their friends. They learn about the benefits of exercise and become more aware of their bodies as they play well planned games in the school gym. Most children listen attentively as they follow instructions to try out yoga stretches. Most children make good progress across a wide range of areas of the curriculum as they explore their senses, transport and rotate objects or design and create models using junk materials. Children apply their knowledge of technology as they use a digital scale and follow a recipe as they make items to sell to parents. A few children enjoy the responsibility of assessing and identifying risk in the outdoor space before their friends play there. Children benefit from a valuable collaboration with teachers in P1. Most children enthusiastically listen to, predict and create stories. They enjoy retelling and acting out stories they have recorded with the help of staff. A few children are now ready to identify and create their own rhyming words and songs.

All children, including those with additional support needs, are supported very well to make choices and share their learning and progress in their own individual way. Children use sign language, visuals, gestures, and communication aids to make choices about their learning, communicate their needs and decide where to play. Most children are ready for a wider range of more challenging play experiences that better match their prior learning and support them to apply their skills in the outdoor area. Staff use praise appropriately to celebrate when children experience success

or demonstrate the nursery values as they help their friends. The team should now use their strong knowledge of children's achievements out with nursery to better inform how they build on and develop further children's skills.

Senior leaders and all staff have a well-informed understanding of children's home lives. They use this well to identify barriers to learning and children's individual strengths and motivators. Keyworkers have a well-rounded picture of each individual learner. The senior and lead practitioners support keyworkers effectively to use their regular observations of learners to inform weekly team meetings. This shows positive signs of improving the planning of all learning spaces. The team meet three times across the week to ensure all keyworkers can participate. Staff track the progress children make in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing, a few areas of expressive arts and science. Together senior leaders and keyworkers review this twice per year using staff observations, children's books, staff meetings and parent's views. These meetings, and the support and challenge of the senior practitioner, increasingly informs more accurate judgements about the progress children make across most areas of their learning. The team should continue with their plans to track progress across all areas of the curriculum. Staff develop measurable targets with parents and visiting professionals and consistently implement agreed strategies where children have additional support needs. Parents and staff and communicate well in helpful home visits and focused meeting that ensure children with additional support needs make appropriate progress. The team should continue to develop their understanding of effective strategies that ensure equity for all children. This should help staff to identify and increase targeted interventions that accelerate progress for specific children.

Safeguarding(HMIE)

- Inspectors discussed safeguarding and child protection information provided by the ELC setting with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the ELC setting and the education authority.

Outcome of inspection

We are confident that the ELC setting has the capacity to continue to improve and so we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection.

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HM Inspector

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