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

Summarised inspection findings

Catrine Early Childhood Centre

East Ayrshire Council

24 November 2026

HM Inspectors gathered evidence to enable us to evaluate the ELC's work using two quality indicators from the Quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors. This document provides our summarised findings.

Key contextual information

Catrine Early Childhood Centre (ECC) is a local authority setting that offers 1140 funded hours of early learning and childcare as part of Catrine Primary School. The setting is located within a rural village of East Ayrshire and operates from a separate building around a mile away from the school building. The adapted building contains various playrooms named after key areas in the village including the voes, square and brig that together make up 'the village'. The ECC has direct access to several large outdoor play spaces with a distinct, secure area for the youngest children. There is an extensive partly covered outdoor play area accessed by an automatic door. Children attend on part-time or full-time places on a term time basis. The setting is registered for 87 children to attend at any one time. Currently there are 44 children on the roll. The experienced depute manager of the ECC works as part of the wider school leadership team. The headteacher has overall management responsibility for the ECC. The depute manager is undertaking a short secondment to another setting. A temporary depute manager is supporting the work of the team. Both staff members were present during the inspection. The team also includes a janitor, catering, clerical and facilities staff who work with a senior practitioner, seven practitioners and three support assistants.

Learning, teaching and assessment	**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

The Voes

- The youngest children are independent, motivated and determined learners. The team are highly responsive to children's individual preferences and needs. Staff create a welcoming and interesting environment for learning. This supports children well to explore and frequently transport resources across indoor and outdoor spaces. Attentive and sensitive staff support children skilfully. This sustains children's engagement for extended periods of time. Children

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enjoy the freedom and time to repeat favourite activities. Staff capture children's attention as they sing and sign instructions, narrate their actions, and use their tone of voice skilfully. This develops well children's early communication and listening skills as staff build connections with children and parents.

Children aged three years and over

- Staff, children and parents have developed highly positive relationships in the respectful, patient and nurturing ethos. Together they have developed a keen sense of community and support. Children benefit from a caring, warm welcome. Children are excited and motivated to start their play. Most children are confident as they participate in well planned, brief small group activities within established free play routines. Staff have worked effectively to create a dark, cosy area that provides a dedicated place for rest and sleep. Children freely access the extensive outdoor area throughout their session. All staff support children appropriately as they begin to learn how to share resources and spaces with other children. Staff should now continue to develop further a few learning spaces throughout the indoor and outdoor areas. To improve learning further a few staff now need to continue to deepen and extend their understanding of how to challenge children and make connections across learning.

- The team are attentive and responsive to children. Staff value children's ideas and questions, children direct their own play and follow their own interests. Staff are supportive and encouraging as they listen carefully to what children would like to learn more about. Where practice is best, staff support children to explore and use resources to develop their own ideas using carefully judged questions and commentary. In a few cases, staff miss opportunities to build on and develop further children's learning. In the best examples, staff are highly skilled as they spot opportunities to extend learning as children play. Staff provide thoughtfully planned small group experiences that develop children's sense of self and early communication skills well.

- Children enjoy exploring an appropriate range of digital technologies. The team have extended the use of technology in the local area using quick access codes to share learning with families in the village. As planned, children are now ready to use technologies to document, extend and deepen their learning.

- The depute manager supports the team very well to have a clear, shared understanding of their collective responsibility to plan and reflect on children's interests, learning, rights and progress. All of the team confidently implement a well-established, thoughtfully considered, approach to planning and observing learning. Together, staff deliver an appropriate balance of responsive and intentional learning. Most staff are now ready to develop further how they use their information about children's skills and learning from home to inform how they plan to challenge and extend learning. The team should continue to improve this across the indoor and outdoor areas.

- Staff engage in regular professional dialogue and helpful focused team meetings to share what they know about children's learning and development. Staff share children's progress with parents and agree individualised targets for learning. The team document children's play through observations and photos in online learning journals and link these to different areas within the curriculum. Senior leaders support staff very well to track the progress of individual children, targeted groups of children and those who have specific long- or short-term needs. Staff have a comprehensive view of the progress children are making across all areas of the

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curriculum. The team use this information effectively to quickly provide personalised additional support that enables children to make progress.

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Children's Progress	very good

This quality indicator reflects the extent to which children are making meaningful progress in their learning and development over time. It focuses on the holistic nature of children's learning and development. It ensures these foundations are secure to achieve future success and attainment. It requires a clear and shared understanding of early learning pedagogy and child development, supported by strong pedagogical leadership. It reflects the integrated way children learn and the importance of high-quality interactions, experiences and spaces. It emphasises that high-quality early learning and childcare (ELC) contributes to closing the attainment gap and ensuring equity for all.

This quality indicator has a strong emphasis on the use of data and meaningful evidence to inform future planning and to report to parents/carers about their child's progress. It recognises the vital role of early learning and childcare in closing the poverty-related attainment gap and ensuring equity for all children.

The themes are:

- children's progress over time
- overall quality of children's achievements
- ensuring equity for all children

The Voes

- The youngest children enjoy warm, nurturing and highly positive relationships with staff. Children sign and increasingly use single words and gestures as they make their needs known. Children are increasing their use of vocabulary as they interact with staff and one another. A few children enjoy helping staff prepare lunch. Staff are consistent, highly responsive and adapt very effectively to children's temperaments and needs to personalise support. This enables all children to transition successfully between activities, from home to the playroom and between learning spaces with confidence. All children make particularly strong progress in their early communication, gross and fine motor skills.

Children aged three years and over

- Senior leaders skilfully support all team members to accelerate children's progress over time through accurate, well-judged feedback to staff. Children make frequent, well-informed choices about their play and learning. They are becoming resourceful, resilient and capable learners as they make use of resources to investigate, explore and revisit concepts across the curriculum. Staff consistently apply their extensive knowledge of the strengths of all children, particularly those who require additional support. This is supporting children to maximise their progress in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Key workers meet termly with senior leaders to review and discuss children's progress. Senior leaders capably use improvement methodology to identify, reflect on and drive improvements. The team make effective use of audits, focused observations and impactful self-evaluation activities to improve all areas of their work. The team moderate their professional judgements about significant learning with increasing skill. As a result, staff have a thorough understanding of children as learners, they support children's progress in health and wellbeing in a targeted way. Staff make effective use of local authority guidance to track children's learning accurately across the curriculum.

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- Practitioners provide highly effective support to meet children's needs. This is resulting in children who are very confident in the setting. Children are developing highly positive attitudes to learning. Senior leaders and staff have a well-planned approach that supports continuity in children's learning at points of transition. Staff work in close, trusting partnerships with parents to ensure children make the progress that is right for them. The team involve, consult and work well with parents to create detailed personal learning plans when children start nursery. Senior leaders, staff and parents agree clear, specific and measurable targets, which have an appropriate focus on children's wellbeing. Staff regularly refine and review these targets with parents over time to inform and ensure continued progress.

- Children's early communication and language skills are flourishing. Children enjoy sharing stories with adults and each other and retell familiar stories as they play. They imaginatively use puppets to explore further well-known books. Children follow visual prompts that maximise their independence and most children keenly develop their mark making and emergent writing skills well in the creative indoor and outdoor spaces. Children are becoming increasingly confident as they use numbers and count when playing and during daily routines. Children enjoy practically applying mathematical and numeracy skills as they care for herbs and plants in the garden or use clocks and telephones. They use comparative language knowledgably as they compare the capacity of perfume bottles.

- Staff highlight children's achievements in a range of ways including the 'wow' wall, floorbooks and the effective use of praise during group times. Parents contribute regularly to children's personal learning journals, sharing learning from home. As a result, staff have a well-informed understanding of what children like to participate in and what children's strengths and skills are. Senior leaders should continue to explore ways to build on these achievements from home.

- There is a supportive and inclusive ethos within the nursery. Staff have a strong understanding of children and their families and know them well as individuals. They have an in-depth understanding of children's family backgrounds and any individual challenges. Staff readily identify children who require extra support to help them make progress, creating appropriate plans with clear, measurable targets. Staff link timeously with outside professionals to provide children with the support they need. They actively engage in partnership working to support children with communication needs. For example, staff have developed their use of symbols and simple signing to support children as they play. Staff are proactive and resourceful as they find ways to minimise or reduce barriers to experiences and opportunities for children. The team make effective use of their minibus to widen children's experience of their local community and provide opportunities to apply their skills. This develops well children's confidence and provides opportunities for learning beyond their local area.

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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. Areas for development have been agreed with the setting and the education authority.

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Other relevant evidence

- The depute manager rightly prioritises maximising the attendance of children by supporting staff to provide appropriate support and information to parents. Staff follow established procedures to share information when children are unable to attend the ECC. Parents and staff share information quickly about children's needs and make well considered changes to children's routines or the support they offer to parents. The flexible and sensitive approach of senior leaders ensures families and staff work effectively together to maximise children's attendance wherever possible.

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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.

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