

Summarised inspection findings

Blacklands Primary School Early Years Class

North Ayrshire Council

4 February 2025

Key contextual information

Blacklands Early Years Class (EYC) is situated within Blacklands Primary School. It serves the areas of Blacklands and Dirrans in Kilwinning. Since August 2024, children attend the setting from 9.00 am to 3.00 pm during school term time.

The setting is registered for 16 children, aged three to starting primary school. Fifteen children currently attend the setting. Almost all children live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation deciles 1 and 2. There is a large playroom with direct access to a covered outdoor area and garden. Children have the opportunity to visit another garden area each day. In addition, practitioners and children regularly visit the school garden and forest. The senior early years practitioner (SEYP) and one of the two full-time early years practitioners (EYP) took up post in August 2024. The other full-time EYP has been in post for 6 years. The headteacher has overall responsibility for the setting. The deputy headteacher shares responsibility for the day to day running of the setting with the senior EYP.

1.3 Leadership of change

very good

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 children from the primary school reviewed very successfully the school and setting vision, values and aims. They consulted early years staff, parents and children fully for their views. Almost all children and practitioners demonstrate very well the values of respect, kindness, knowledge and fun in their interactions with each other. For example, when children are playing together, they explain clearly that they are being kind and respectful by sharing toys.
- All practitioners have a very good knowledge and understanding of the socio-economic context in which their children and families live. They share a strong focus on providing high-quality early learning and childcare for all children who attend the setting. They have developed quickly strong working relationships and there is a very positive ethos across the setting. Working together, senior leaders and practitioners use a wide range of setting specific policies and audits effectively to ensure consistency of practice across the setting. The deputy headteacher has developed a clear calendar of self-evaluation and activities to monitor the quality of learning and teaching. The staff team use this very effectively to check and audit the work of the setting. The deputy headteacher observes regularly practitioners' practice in learning and teaching. She identifies very successfully areas of good practice and provides practitioners with clear points for action. For example, she identified a need to improve the outdoor environment and experiences for children. Practitioners have worked very well together to provide an attractive outdoor environment where children can be curious and explore and develop their learning and physical skills. Now there is a settled staff team, senior leaders should continue to review closely actions identified to ensure monitoring improves consistently practice across the setting.

- Almost all children are developing leadership skills very successfully as they take responsibility for preparing snack and setting up tables for lunch. They enjoy working with staff to identify which resources they like to use as they play and learn. All practitioners are beginning to lead aspects of the work of the nursery. For example, the SEYP led robust self-evaluation of current processes for planning learning and teaching. As a result, practitioners have reviewed and updated planning formats to be implemented in the next term. All practitioners are keen to develop their leadership skills further in a wide range of activities which best meet the needs of children in the setting.
- All practitioners participate fully in regular self-evaluation with senior leaders using guidance in How good is our early learning and childcare? Practitioners make very effective use of face to face meetings with parents to ask parents and carers for their views about the life and work of the setting. They use data gathered through such activities effectively to identify key priorities for improvement in the setting. For example, practitioners offer 'stay and play' sessions now at any time during the day or week for parents. This is helping more parents to attend and learn alongside their child at a time that suits them best. Senior leaders and practitioners are well placed to develop further strategies to help parents to take an active role in helping them to fulfil priorities for improvement.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

very 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

- There are very respectful, nurturing relationships between children and practitioners and among children. Working together, practitioners and children developed an EYC charter with clear links to children's rights. All practitioners use agreed approaches effectively almost all of the time to help children regulate their behaviour and engage positively in activities. This is helping almost all children to behave very well as they play and learn.
- Practitioners have worked very well together to create attractive learning environments indoors and outdoors. Almost all children engage very well, for extended periods of time, in a wide range of learning activities, such as creating dens outdoors. Practitioners identified rightly that the newly extended day provides staff and children with more time to deepen and extend learning. They now refresh adult-initiated provocations in the setting more often during each week. This is helping them to provide an effective blend of child-led and well-planned child-initiated and adult-initiated activities each day. As a result, almost all children are developing very well their skills of creativity, curiosity and enquiry. For example, children enjoy making birthday cards in the creative area indoors and exploring what happens when different scents are added to play dough. Almost all children are becoming increasingly independent in their learning and make choices about what and where they will play.
- Practitioners interact successfully with children with respect and warmth. All practitioners use a range of questioning techniques well to establish facts or get children to explain their thinking. For example, children explain clearly why they think ice melts quickly when hot water is added compared to more slowly when cold water is added.
- All practitioners make careful observations of learning in children's individual learning journals. They should ensure these observations are consistently about the skills children are developing as they play and learn. They share this information regularly with parents through the recently introduced online learning journals. A few parents add children's learning at home to the online journals. Parents, practitioners and children identify next steps and targets regularly to help children to make progress. Practitioners are well placed to develop further strategies to help children to be more aware of their individual targets and what they could do to achieve them.
- Practitioners involve children in planning learning by asking them what they would like to learn about and which resources they would like to use. They work well with partners in other agencies and with parents to develop clear plans for children who require additional support with their learning. Practitioners make effective use of local authority developmental pathways, linked to Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) experiences and outcomes, in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing, to plan children's learning. They ensure coverage of CfE experiences and outcomes for intentional and responsive planning of all other areas of the curriculum.

- Practitioners make very effective use of the local authority developmental milestone progression frameworks to track children's progress in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. They meet termly with the deputy headteacher to do so. The deputy headteacher collates this data termly to identify gaps in children's learning. Practitioners use this information well to help them plan playroom activities. As planned, practitioners need to provide targeted interventions for children with gaps in their learning.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning and developmental pathways

- Practitioners use progression pathways linked to CfE experiences and outcomes in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. They use these very successfully to provide motivating, relevant experiences for children. They closely monitor coverage of CfE experiences and outcomes across all areas of the curriculum to ensure children receive a broad and balanced curriculum. All children benefit from daily access to the outdoor area if they wish, where they are curious and creative as they play and learn. They enjoy regular visits to the school 'forest' where they climb trees and explore nature. As planned, practitioners should continue to develop the outdoor environment further to include an increased range of loose parts and natural materials.
- Children enjoy using a range of digital technology such as digital tablets, digital cameras and the interactive whiteboard to extend their learning. Practitioners support children effectively to research areas of personal interest online, such as types of animals who may be albino.
- Practitioners work very well with local partners to enhance children's learning. Children and parents recently visited the local library for a 'Bookbug' session which helped to develop children's interests in books.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on children and families – parental engagement

- Parents welcome the regular opportunities they have to play and learn with their child in the setting. They welcome opportunities to engage in conversations with staff about their child's progress. Practitioners keep parents fully informed about the life and work of the nursery. They do so through daily informal discussion at pick up and drop off times, children's folders and newly introduced learning journals. Practitioners use a range of strategies to seek the views of parents to help them identify areas for improvement in the setting. As planned, they should consider how they evaluate the impact parental engagement has on outcomes for children.
- Parents benefit from support thorough regular sessions with multi-agency partners. For example, parents attended a recent workshop provided by partners in speech and language therapy. They learned a range of helpful hints and tips to help them support their child's speech and language development at home.
- Practitioners use data about children progress to identify gaps in children's learning. They use this data effectively to help them identify a developmental 'milestone of the month'. They provide activities in nursery and for use at home linked to the milestone of the month. This is helping them to close gaps in children's learning and increase children's progress. Practitioners use the EYC lending library to share useful information and resources to help parents support their child's learning at home. They include links to the developmental milestones and online instruction videos, produced by practitioners, about using the resources. This is helping parents to make effective use of these resources to support their child's learning at home.

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.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

very good

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

- All practitioners and senior leaders have a very strong focus on developing children's wellbeing. Practitioners use the language of the wellbeing indicators very effectively in their daily interactions with children. Almost all children take turns to effectively risk assess the outdoor area at the start of each day to ensure they are playing in a safe environment. For example, they identify and describe that areas need to be clear of ice, so they are not slippery. Children identify successfully how they keep healthy by eating healthy snacks and brushing their teeth. Almost all children demonstrate responsibility when they tidy up after play. They are very respectful of each other and practitioners in their interactions.
- All children are developing their independence skills very well as they take turns to prepare snack or set the tables for lunch. All children benefit from an unhurried lunchtime experience. They engage fully in conversation with practitioners who sit with them and share the experience. They take turns well with their friends as they serve themselves and tidy up their dishes.
- All practitioners have a clear understanding of, and comply effectively with, their statutory duties in relation to early learning and childcare, including keeping children safe. Practitioners meet regularly with all parents and children for learning conversations to develop individual care plans which meet statutory requirements. Senior leaders meet regularly with practitioners, parents, and multi-agency partners to develop clear individual plans to help children who require additional support with their learning. As a result, all children are supported very well in nursery and making very good progress with their learning and wellbeing.
- Practitioners and children ensure the setting is a highly inclusive place to play and learn. Children include others very successfully in their play and are highly aware and understanding of each other's needs. Across the year, children learn about a range of religious and cultural festivals, such as Diwali and Christmas. They explain well some key features of these festivals. For example, they explain Diwali is a festival of light. Practitioners work successfully with partners, such as a local charity, to help children understand the individual health needs some children and adults experience. As a result of a recent workshop, children have developed very well their understanding of why people need to wear glasses or use physical aids. As a result of this learning children were very interested in prostheses. They identified that a playroom stuffed giraffe toy had lost a leg and would benefit from a prosthesis. Supported by practitioners they made a prosthesis for their giraffe. Practitioners now need to help children to develop their understanding of diversity on a wider level beyond their own immediate environment.

3.2 Securing children's progress

very 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

- Almost all children are making very good progress in early communication and language. Younger children communicate their needs well through gesture and single words. Older children explain effectively what they are doing as they play. Almost all children follow simple instructions very successfully and take turns appropriately in short conversations with adults. Almost all children make appropriate to their age and stage as they draw recognisable figures, copy numerals and record data in risk assessments. All children enjoy looking at books and listening to stories read to them by practitioners. Children are developing their knowledge of rhyme through singing simple songs and nursery rhymes. A few children need continued support to develop their clarity of speech and extend their vocabulary.
- Almost all children are making very good progress in numeracy and mathematics. Children count well to five, or to ten and beyond, appropriate to their age and stage, in a range of play and real life contexts. For example, they count as they collate registers, count out cutlery or count objects in their play. They enjoy identifying and naming two-dimensional shapes in simple board games or games on the interactive whiteboard. Children describe with confidence the routine of the day, including day and night. They demonstrate effectively their understanding of positional language as they organise resources beside, behind and in front. Most children would benefit from further opportunities to develop further their knowledge of measure in a range of real life experiences. For example, using measure tapes and rulers in the construction areas.
- Almost all children are making very good progress in health and wellbeing. They have settled very well in nursery with the new staff team. Children enjoy developing their gross motor skills as they climb and balance in outdoor areas. They are developing their fine motor skills successfully in a range of activities. For example, they cut vegetables for snack or use scissors as they are being creative. Children are developing age appropriate understanding of the need for hygiene by hand washing before meals and snack. They are developing very well their skills of independence as they dress themselves appropriately for outdoor play or self-serve their snack.
- A few parents share children's wider achievements from home, and these are displayed on the 'WHOOSH' (we highlight our out of school heroes) wall. Children select work they are proud of,

and practitioners display it on the 'proud pegs' in the playroom. Practitioners monitor carefully children's achievements. They need to use this information better to ensure those who do not yet have achievements shared from home are given opportunities to identify achievements in the setting. Practitioners need to consider how they track and monitor children's progress across the curriculum in a streamlined, more strategic way. Practitioners understand and support the individual needs of their families very well. All families can freely access hats and scarves for cold weather in winter. All children benefit from access to waterproof clothing for outdoor play. Parents speak positively about the support practitioners provide with form filling for financial and material supports. This includes signposting families to local agencies to support individual families' needs. Senior leaders ensure all outings are fully funded to ensure no child misses out due to financial hardship.

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.