Early learning and childcare (ELC) setting shared inspection report

Isobel Mair Family Centre

East Renfrewshire Council
27 October 2026

In August 2026, a team of inspectors from HMIE and the Care Inspectorate visited Isobel Mair Family Centre. During our visit, we talked to parents/carers and children and worked closely with the headteacher, senior leaders and staff.

Key inspection findings

- Senior leaders provide staff with valuable opportunities to develop their skills and take on leadership roles within the family centre. This helps create a strong, supportive team that is focused on achieving the best outcomes for children and their families.

- Senior leaders support staff to create a warm and welcoming environment where children feel safe, happy, and cared for. Staff are kind and attentive to each child's needs, helping them feel valued and supported. As a result, children build trusting relationships with adults and seek comfort when needed.

- The range of learning, play and therapeutic experiences available supports children very well to learn and develop across the curriculum. These experiences help children become confident learners. Children are developing positive "have-a-go" attitudes as they engage in new experiences.

- Senior leaders and staff have built strong partnerships with parents and carers by offering opportunities to learn, connect, and get involved in the nursery. This creates a supportive community where families can share experiences, access advice, and feel supported, helping to improve children's wellbeing.

- Senior leaders and staff should continue to strengthen how they track children's overall development. This will help staff record children's progress more accurately and ensure every child builds on their learning and skills as they move through the nursery.

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	very good
Learning, teaching and assessment	good
Nurturing, care and support	very good
Children's progress	very good

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Summary of inspection findings

Key contextual Information

The Isobel Mair Family Centre is an early learning and childcare (ELC) setting based in the campus of Isobel Mair School, East Renfrewshire. The family centre provides ELC places for up to 40 children at any one time. All children are allocated placements in the family centre through the Early Years Placement Panel as part of East Renfrewshire Council's staged intervention process. Children can attend from birth until they begin primary school. The current roll is 19. All children have a range and complexity of additional support needs including health, care, physical, communication, and developmental needs. The family centre delivers 1140 hours of early learning and childcare through a range of morning, full day and afternoon sessions. The family centre is open from 8 am until 6 pm, 50 weeks of the year. Children attend from across the local authority. A minority of children use local authority transportation to attend the family centre.

The Isobel Mair Campus was purpose built and opened in 2012. The family centre comprises three playrooms with outdoor spaces, flexible learning areas, offices, and a sensory room.

Staffing consists of a headteacher who has overall responsibility for the family centre and school campus. The rest of the leadership team comprises of a depute head of centre with a remit of day-to-day management of the family centre, a senior child development officer and a teacher. The family centre has a further 19 child development officers, a support worker and three early years play workers.

Leadership:
Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

We found major strengths in this aspect of the setting's work and identified very few areas for improvement; therefore, we evaluated this quality indicator as very good.

Children were cared for by a well-established staff team with a strong understanding of child development. Staff recognised the importance of nurturing approaches and supported children to make choices in their play. We observed staff responding sensitively to children's individual needs and interests. They followed children's lead and used meaningful interactions to extend learning and enjoyment. This approach helped children feel valued, confident and secure in the setting.

Staff were knowledgeable about the children in their care and used training opportunities well to develop their skills and professional practice. Staff were confident in providing responsive and effective support. Regular quality conversations

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enabled reflection on practice, achievements, challenges and development needs. Managers were approachable and supportive, promoting professional growth through training and learning opportunities. Shared learning strengthened team knowledge and consistency of practice. As a result, staff felt valued, motivated, and committed to delivering high-quality care and support.

Leaders recognised the importance of distributed leadership and staff held champion roles across the nursery. These included leading areas such as wellbeing, literacy, numeracy and outdoor learning. Staff involved families in their champion areas, working alongside them to make meaningful improvements to children's experiences. This helped tailor developments to the needs of children, ensuring their cultural values were respected. Children and families feel included, respected and valued. Staff were committed and motivated to make improvements through their champion roles. This approach strengthened inclusive practice and helped children access learning, make choices and participate fully in nursery life.

The values, vision and aims of the service were embedded across the setting and reflected in daily practice. Staff used these to guide their work and provide consistent care and support. We observed children being respected, included and supported in all aspects of nursery life. Staff focused on meeting individual needs and promoting positive relationships. One parent shared, "The Family Centre has always taken the time to understand my child's individual needs, providing a safe, nurturing and welcoming environment where they feel comfortable and valued." These shared staff values created a consistent approach to care and helping children feel secure and confident.

Staff communicated clearly throughout the inspection and adapted their practice to meet individual needs. Staff deployment was well planned and ensured children received responsive support throughout the day. This was particularly evident during key transition times, such as drop-off and pick-up. This approach helped children feel secure, supported and confident in their daily experiences.

Children play and learn: Learning, teaching and assessment

The family centre's ethos is firmly embedded in children's rights, dignity and positive relationships. Staff interactions are consistently warm, respectful and responsive, creating an inclusive environment where children feel safe, valued and supported to participate in learning.

Staff know children very well and use this understanding to promote wellbeing, engagement and achievement. As a result, almost all children demonstrate secure attachments, engage confidently with adults and are settled within the setting. A few older children undertake leadership roles across the family centre and school, developing confidence, responsibility and a sense of contribution.

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Staff's approaches to care planning are effective and responsive to individual needs. They devise enhanced support plans to clearly identify barriers and strategies, enabling them to provide children with bespoke support. Children confidently seek reassurance from trusted adults, reflecting strong relationships and emotional security.

Most children engage happily in meaningful, unhurried play experiences matched to their developmental stage and additional support needs. A few children require further support to extend their range and tolerance of sustained play experiences. Planned and responsive opportunities across indoor, outdoor and community contexts broaden learning and promote confidence, resilience and curiosity. Staff should continue to monitor the balance of the day for children attending in the afternoon to ensure they fully benefit from play-based learning and wider opportunities.

Staff demonstrate a strong understanding of individual communication styles. Professional learning in British Sign Language, alternative and augmentative communication and music-based therapeutic interaction has strengthened practice and supported children's participation. Staff should make more consistent use of total communication approaches, including modelling and communication-rich commentary beyond planned sessions and points of transition. This would further enhance children's understanding and communication development.

Children benefit from well-planned opportunities to develop physical and independence skills. Strong partnership working with health professionals ensures movement programmes and positioning strategies effectively support participation and progress. Staff should continue to strengthen purposeful movement opportunities for a few children. They should continue to ensure experiences remain closely aligned to developmental priorities, regulation needs and next steps.

Staff use learning environments and continuous provision to meet the needs of most children well. They provide a range of sensory, open-ended and loose-parts resources to promote curiosity, exploration and creativity. Most children confidently make choices, follow their interests and lead aspects of their learning where possible. Staff are attuned to children's needs and, in the strongest examples, use observation and responsive interactions effectively to extend engagement and deepen learning. Staff should continue to explore ways to develop children's sensory awareness and tolerances through creative experiences.

Staff use a wide range of information, including multi-agency reports, medical assessments and home visits, to establish accurate baselines. This provides a clear understanding of strengths, needs and barriers to learning, enabling high-quality personalised support for children and families.

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Staff's approaches to planning reflects children's interests, developmental needs and, in the strongest examples, prior learning. Their increasingly effective balance of responsive learning and intentional teaching supports progress across communication, cognition, physical development, self-care and independence. Senior leaders should continue refining learning pathways to ensure progression builds consistently on prior learning and developmental milestones including a greater focus of holistic progress.

Senior leaders have supported staff to develop higher-quality observations. Observations are increasingly evaluative and specific. Learning pathway reviews and professional dialogue help staff to identify significant learning and appropriate next steps. Recent improvements in evaluating learning pathways are providing a clearer picture of holistic progress and strengthening professional judgement. Senior leaders should continue to ensure all observations as of a consistent high quality.

Staff are using a new tracking system effectively to monitor the progress of children in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Senior leaders and staff should streamline assessment and tracking processes into a more coherent approach that captures children's holistic development effectively. Greater emphasis on evaluative recording, including participation, engagement and levels of support required, would provide stronger evidence of progress and intervention impact. Senior leaders and staff should consider ways to better identify and record the small but significant gains children make in communication, sensory and physical development, independence and life skills. This information should be used to inform more targeted planning and improve outcomes for children.

Children are supported to achieve: Nurturing care and support

We found major strengths in this aspect of the setting's work and identified very few areas for improvement; therefore, we evaluated this quality indicator as very good.

Children were cared for by warm, loving and compassionate staff who understood their individual needs. Staff confidently and enthusiastically shared children's progress, achievements and support needs. Children looked to staff for comfort, and staff responded with open body language, hugs and reassurance. One parent shared, "My child loves attending the nursery, they are always happy on arrival and pick up. I feel the staff celebrate their achievements just as much as me and are as proud of them as we are. I am so grateful to this setting for the love and support they provide us with." Staff were skilled at responding to children's individual communication styles. They interpreted non-verbal cues and followed children's lead during play. Staff respected children's choices and responded in ways that promoted wellbeing and participation.

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Children experienced mealtimes that were tailored to their individual needs. Staff created opportunities for social interaction while ensuring children remained safe when eating. Children were encouraged to develop independence skills during meals. Meals were relaxed and unhurried, allowing children time to enjoy their food. This approach supported confidence, independence and positive relationships with food.

Personal care routines were carried out sensitively, and staff sought children's permission before wiping noses, changing clothes and changing nappies. Staff respected children's dignity and responded to their needs in a calm and reassuring manner. This approach helped children feel safe, respected and valued.

All children had personal plans created and reviewed in partnership with families. These plans reflected each child's routines, preferences and individual needs. Staff recorded meaningful information and identified clear strategies to support children's wellbeing and development. This helped ensure children experienced consistent, responsive care. Staff worked closely with other professionals, helping children and families achieve the best possible outcomes. Plans provided a clear picture of each child and helped staff respond quickly, sensitively and compassionately. This approach supported children to feel understood, valued and secure.

Transitions across the setting were individual and adapted to meet each child's needs. Staff planned transitions in partnership with families to ensure children received consistent support. Home visits and strong links with the school helped children and families prepare for change. This supported children's emotional wellbeing and helped them feel secure and confident. Daily transitions within the setting were also well planned. Staff used responsive approaches, including visual supports, to make changes in routine as smooth as possible. This helped children understand what would happen next and supported participation.

Connections with families were strong. Families were warmly welcomed into the setting and treated with respect. Staff shared information in a positive and supportive way, which reflected strong relationships. Families had opportunities to take part in stay-and-play sessions and parenting classes. These opportunities helped build positive connections between staff and families. They also created a supportive community where parents could share experiences and access advice. This approach helped families feel involved and supported, which benefited children's wellbeing.

Children are supported to achieve: Children's progress

All children in the family centre require significant levels of additional support in their learning and development. Overall, almost all children make very good holistic progress from their starting points.

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As a result of the range of children's experiences and the quality of staff interactions, almost all children across the centre make very good progress in their learning and development. Children achieve very well against targets set within learning pathways, care plans and playroom plans. Staff ensure targets correctly focus on key areas of learning and development. This includes a focus, where required, on reducing the barriers children face because of their additional support needs. A few children make more accelerated progress, exceeding expectations. A few children could achieve more in developing their communication and interaction skills. Staff should provide these children with further challenge to help them make the best possible progress.

Almost all children make very good progress in their physical development. They use specialist equipment and mobility aids confidently, and engage positively in activities that develop coordination, balance and movement skills. Through soft play, outdoor learning and active experiences, children build confidence, resilience and problem-solving skills very well. Staff support children effectively to manage risk, make choices and develop independence through daily routines and self-care activities.

Children communicate their needs, preferences and emotions effectively using a range of approaches, including gesture, vocalisation, facial expression and signing. Staff understand and respond sensitively to these communication methods, ensuring children feel valued, understood and included. As a result, children take part actively in learning and increasingly lead aspects of their own learning experiences.

Across early numeracy and mathematics, children develop important foundational skills through meaningful daily experiences. They show increasing awareness of routines, sequencing and time, supported by visual prompts and consistent structures. A few children are developing counting skills, recognising patterns and applying mathematical language appropriately within play contexts.

Staff gather a wide range of evidence through observations, learner pathway reviews, multidisciplinary discussions and learning journals. This provides a strong picture of children's progress and development over time. As new tracking systems become embedded, staff should continue to draw together all available evidence to strengthen professional judgements. They should also ensure next steps build consistently on prior learning across all areas of development.

Transitions are highly effective. Individualised arrangements support children moving into the family centre, between rooms and on to school. Children and families benefit from carefully planned approaches that reduce anxiety, build confidence and promote continuity. Regular opportunities to learn and play within the wider school environment help children become familiar with staff, peers and routines, supporting successful transitions to Primary 1.

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Staff celebrate achievements very effectively. Regular praise, learning journeys and displays recognise children's successes and strengthen confidence, motivation and self-esteem. Children show pride in their achievements and respond positively to encouragement from staff.

Partnerships with families make a significant contribution to children's progress. Daily communication, wellbeing check-ins and learning journeys enable staff and parents to share achievements and reflect on learning together. This provides a more holistic understanding of children's development and supports consistency between home and the family centre.

Senior leaders and staff know children and families exceptionally well, including those experiencing additional challenges or disadvantage. They monitor attendance carefully and provide bespoke support where required, resulting in improved participation for identified families. This strong understanding of individual circumstances promotes equity, removes barriers to engagement and helps ensure that all children are supported to achieve the best possible outcomes.

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. At the time of the inspection, there were no identified areas for development.

Practice worth sharing more widely (HMIE)

Leaders recognise the importance of distributed leadership, and staff hold champion roles across the nursery. These include leading areas such as wellbeing, literacy, numeracy and outdoor learning. Staff involve families in their champion areas, working alongside them to make meaningful improvements to children's experiences. This helps to tailor developments to the needs of children and ensures their cultural values are respected. Children and families feel included, respected and valued. Staff are committed and motivated to make improvements through their champion roles. This approach strengthens inclusive practice and helps children access learning, make choices and participate fully in nursery life.

Connections with families are strong. Families are warmly welcomed into the setting and treated with respect. Staff share information in a positive and supportive way, reflecting the strong relationships they have established. Families have opportunities to take part in stay-and-play sessions and parenting classes. These opportunities help to build positive links between staff and families. They also create a supportive

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community where parents share experiences and access advice. This approach helps families feel involved and supported, benefiting children's wellbeing.

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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