

Summarised inspection findings

Auchinleck Early Childhood Centre

East Ayrshire Council

3 March 2026

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

Key contextual information

Auchinleck Early Childhood Centre is part of Auchinleck Primary School. The centre is registered to provide funded early learning and childcare (ELC) for 79 children, aged from two to those not yet attending school. There are 69 children on the roll, 10 aged two to three years and 59 aged three to five years. The centre consists of two playrooms and designated outdoor spaces. The headteacher is the registered manager. The senior leadership team comprises of a depute manager who is responsible for day-to-day operations, an acting senior practitioner and an Excellence and Equity Lead (EEL). Both the acting senior practitioner and EEL are new in their roles and were previously practitioners in the centre. They are supported by 11 practitioners and three support assistants who work different patterns across the week. The centre has operated different models of delivery of ELC over recent years and are in their second year of offering 9 am–3 pm, during term-time. There have also been a number of changes to leadership and the staff team over the last few years.

Curriculum	satisfactory
This quality indicator highlights the importance of placing the needs, interests, rights and progress of children at the centre of curriculum design and implementation. <u>Curriculum</u> is defined as the totality of all that is planned for children from ELC, through school and beyond. It emphasises that children are entitled to a curriculum underpinned by the <u>principles of curriculum design</u> and enriched through meaningful learning experiences indoors, outdoors and within the community. It recognises the need for all children to experience opportunities to develop the interests, knowledge, skills, and attributes they will need to adapt, thrive and achieve in today's world. This quality indicator also recognises the importance of the curriculum supporting progress in children's learning as they enter the setting and at key points of transition. The themes are: • curriculum rationale and design • continuity and progression in the curriculum • partnerships • skills for life and learning	

- Staff in the 'Explorers' room use national practice guidance well to plan appropriate experiences for young children. They provide an attractive learning environment and offer experiences which respond well to children's individual developmental stages.
- Staff in the 'Rainbow' room use well the whole school vision, aims and values of 'family', 'caring', 'respect' and 'confidence' to create a meaningful foundation for the curriculum. They prioritise children's wellbeing and enjoyment of learning through respectful relationships and valuing children's interests. Senior leaders and staff worked together recently to update the curriculum rationale. They recognise they need to develop it further to ensure it reflects the uniqueness of the curriculum all children should receive.
- Children have access to an enclosed outdoor space which they access freely at times during the day. Children have the freedom to run and invent games of their own. The outdoor learning

experience for children is not yet of a high enough quality. It does not enable children sufficiently to develop gross motor skills, explore the natural world, and develop inquiry and curiosity as part of their everyday experience. The outdoor space is prone to become slippery and can also flood. This presents challenges to staff and children in accessing regular outdoor experiences.

- Staff have a clear focus on providing learning in literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing. They work hard as a team to improve how they support children to make progress in these areas over time. They now need to broaden children's experiences by planning learning systematically across all curricular areas. In doing so, staff should ensure effective continuity and progression in children's learning. This will enable children to build more effectively on what they already know and make continuous progress.
- Senior leaders and staff, through their values and positive relationships with families, offer an inclusive approach to the curriculum. They welcome the views of families and the contributions they make to the ethos and day-to-day life of the centre. Families take part in and support their child's learning through stay and play sessions and by using home link bags. Staff recognise families can be more involved in helping to design a curriculum which reflects the needs of their children within the local community.
- Staff invest time in building positive relationships with families when children start nursery for the first time. They plan collaboratively helpful transition programmes for the youngest children. For example, children take part in the 'duckling' group to help them build resilience. This helps children settle well, feel secure and confident. Children who are ready to move to P1 take part in a well-planned transition programme. Staff liaise closely with the school to make sure children have the time they need to learn about their new environment. There is potential for staff to build further on continuity and progression in learning across the early level through working closely with the school.
- Staff recognise the importance of partnerships to enrich children's learning and provide relevant experiences. Children visit the local care home and Dumfries House. They access local amenities to buy ingredients for cooking or choose library books. Children enjoy all of these experiences. Moving forward, staff need to consider how these valuable partnerships support continuity and progression in children's learning. This should help ensure children's skills and knowledge are consolidated and built on.
- Children learn skills for life and learning through their day-to-day activities and through being part of focused groups. For example, children in the Eco Group learn about the environment through litter picking and by planting trees locally. Children are beginning to develop digital skills using programmable toys and an interactive board. Staff encourage families to share children's achievements from home. Senior leaders recognise they need to continue to work with families to capture the skills children are learning more systematically.

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	

- Children in the 'Explorers' room are supported well by very caring relationships with staff. They interact with children in a natural and nurturing way which encourages children to feel secure, content and happy. Staff offer children experiences to support the development of communication and language, confidence, movement and coordination and social development. This includes planned and responsive opportunities for stories, singing and rhymes, sensory exploration, emotional regulation, physical activity and role play. As a result, children have a very positive first experience of ELC.
- In the 'Rainbow' room staff acknowledge and support children's individual emotional needs as they begin their day. Children settle quickly and are ready to learn. Most children are confident, making decisions about where they want to play within well-established routines. Staff provide a range of experiences and ensure resources are accessible allowing children independence. A calm corner provides children space to rest during the day if they choose. Children regularly access this area to explore books and sensory resources with their peers. Staff provide opportunities for mark making, for example in the writing, role play and block play areas. They should maximise natural occurring opportunities, including through routines, such as encouraging children to label their own artwork.
- Staff provide an organised playroom environment with clearly defined areas which children use enthusiastically. They are keen to continue to improve the quality of learning spaces and have begun by exploring improvements to the creative and story areas. Children would benefit from more open-ended resources. This should support them to develop communication, explore mathematical thinking, use their imagination and develop their own ideas in more

depth. Staff support outdoor learning by making good use of the local community including litter picks, use of public transport and visits to the country park.

- Staff interactions with children foster meaningful relationships and support their development. They support children's learning using conversation, commentary and questioning. Senior leaders recognise this is not yet of a consistently high quality across the team. Staff use digital technologies in fun ways to support children's learning. There is capacity to develop the use of technologies to support children's access to learning journals and further enrich their learning.
- Staff and senior leaders continue to develop approaches to planning for children's learning. They plan for children's learning using a newly developed pro-forma to provide experiences and develop areas within the playroom. Staff planning is responsive to children's interests however almost all planned experiences are driven by adult ideas. They should review and refresh the balance between adult-initiated, adult-led, and child-led activities. This should focus on allowing children to make increased choices, be more creative and have more ownership of their learning.
- Staff use daily catch-ups and regular team meetings to share what they know about children's learning and development. Staff share children's progress in learning with parents and agree individualised targets for learning in literacy, numeracy and health wellbeing. Staff document children's play through observations and photos in online learning journals and link this to experiences and outcomes from Curriculum for Excellence. This information helps staff track coverage of all curriculum areas and children's progress in learning. Staff are gaining confidence in their use of data to inform change and support children to make the best possible progress.

Wellbeing, inclusion and equality	good
This quality indicator highlights the importance of positive relationships and children's wellbeing. It recognises the importance of providing high quality, inclusive, and appropriate rights-based support. These approaches result in improved outcomes for children's learning, wellbeing and participation. It takes full account of children who may require additional support to access and benefit fully from their entitlement to high quality ELC. This includes identifying and assessing their learning and wellbeing needs in a timely manner and providing personalised and targeted support. This quality indicator recognises that strong, collaborative partnership working between those supporting children is essential. It highlights the importance of meaningful engagement with children and families to inform decisions about how children's needs should be met. This quality indicator emphasises the important role senior leaders play in ensuring all staff have relevant and worthwhile professional learning to meet the diverse and sometimes complex needs of children. The themes are: • positive relationships and wellbeing • universal support • Identifying and assessing learning needs and targeted support • inclusion and equality	

- Staff promote the wellbeing and inclusion of children and families within a culture of nurture and respect. Senior leaders carefully support staff to ensure their wellbeing. This ensures staff experience positive wellbeing, enabling them to support well children and families. Staff have very positive relationships with families. These provide strong pastoral support as well as, at times, signposting to other professionals, events and services. Staff provide sensitive and nurturing support to help children regulate their emotions and engage meaningfully in learning. Most children are developing positive relationships and friendships with their peers. As a result, they play cooperatively, with minimal conflicts. Most children talk with increasing confidence about their emotions and identify a range of emotions including calm and sad. Children are learning different ways they can keep themselves safe by making positive choices. On outings, for example, they confidently articulate potential dangers and actions they can take to keep themselves safe.
- Staff are at the early stages of introducing children's rights. The team have participated in professional learning to begin to promote a shared understanding of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. They should now progress plans to support the development of children's understanding of their rights in meaningful and accessible ways. This should include increased opportunities for children's voices to be represented. Staff should support this ongoing development by working collaboratively with children and colleagues across the school.
- Staff have successfully used improvement methodology to improve wellbeing outcomes of children. They carefully identified children who may benefit from additional support and

provided focused inputs. Staff also participated in professional learning to support their skills in positive interactions to support children's wellbeing. As a result, staff are more confident in supporting children and assessment information indicates improved outcomes for children's wellbeing. Staff are ready to use this methodology to make further improvements.

- Almost all children engage confidently with the range of nursery experiences, making choices about where they want to play. They are becoming increasingly independent in routines such as snack, personal care and dressing for outdoors. Staff should continue to develop lunch routines to provide a calm experience that maximises learning potential and children's agency.
- Staff are careful to ensure all children participate in experiences. They carefully use different playrooms to best meet individual developmental needs. Their approaches are very flexible and responsive to the needs of individuals. Children who require additional help with their learning are readily identified using assessment information and staff understanding of child development. When required, staff work effectively with other professionals. Staff are ready to implement their plans for carefully planned concentrated work with identified children who may benefit from focused inputs. Where appropriate, children have individual support plans with detailed strategies and targets to progress their learning. Staff should develop targets to be more specific to ensure progress is measurable and allow progress children make to be clearly demonstrated. This should help build on what children already know and can do.
- Senior leaders and staff have an extensive knowledge of what is important to the community in which children live. They are aware of potential barriers to inclusion and work collaboratively and sensitively with families and other professionals to reduce these wherever possible. Senior leaders are enthusiastic about developing further the use of data to help identify and implement strategies to improve progress of children facing barriers.
- Staff should develop approaches to promoting and celebrating diversity through a wider range of experiences and resources. This should help children develop an understanding of the world beyond their immediate experience.

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.

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.

On behalf of His Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland.