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

Summarised inspection findings

Bun-sgoil Ullapuil Clas-àraich - Ullapool Primary School Nursery Class

The Highland Council

25 August 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

Bun-sgoil Ullapuil Clas-àraich - Ullapool Nursery is part of Ullapool Primary School. It is registered for 15 children to attend at any one time. The nursery caters for children aged two to those not yet attending school who learn through the medium of English. There are currently 16 children on the roll. There is also a separate nursery through the medium of Gàidhlig – Gaelic sharing the building and some resources, for example, a shared reception, kitchen, office and sensory room.

Children access their entitlement to funded early learning and childcare (ELC) by attending from 8.50 am until 3.20 pm Monday to Thursday and 8.50 am and 12.50 pm on a Friday. The majority of children also attend a nearby outdoor nursery as part of their entitlement to 1140 hours of ELC. The nursery building was built as an extension to the main school in 2019.

The headteacher took up post in January 2026. She has overall responsibility for both nurseries. In the English Medium Nursery there are two full time early years practitioners (EYP), a part time EYP and a part time support worker. There has been staffing instability, including senior leaders, in recent 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. Curriculum 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 principles of curriculum design 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 are beginning to use the nursery values to inform the curriculum rationale and design. The value of 'care - còir' is evident. Staff interactions with children, and how staff encourage children to interact with each other and with adults show this value. Staff prioritise use of the local community to provide children with a range of stimulating and motivating learning experiences. They should now explore how the nursery values of 'creative' and 'ambition' can inform curriculum design, including having an increased Gaelic ethos and language learning. Senior leaders and staff should work with families to develop a shared curriculum rationale. They should ensure this reflects the uniqueness of the context and the aspirations of all.

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- Staff have a clear focus on providing planned learning in literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing. Over time, and in response to children's interests, staff plan learning experiences in most curriculum areas. Staff should now plan learning, based on more thorough assessment information across all curricular areas. Their planning should focus on providing better continuity and progression in children's learning, building effectively on each child's existing skills and knowledge.

- Staff support children on an individual basis to experience positive transitions when they start nursery. As a result, children settle well and quickly gain confidence. Staff should consider more fully children's learning experiences when attending other ELC settings and how these can be consolidated and built upon. When it is time to move onto primary school, staff implement a planned programme of visits to familiarise children with the school environment. The headteacher and staff should build further on continuity and progression in learning across the early level through working closely with school staff.

- Staff know their community very well. They maximise partnerships to enrich children's learning and provide real-life experiences within the local area. Children benefit significantly from visitors to the nursery and to exciting, relevant visits in the community. Recently, children have explored the ferry that sails from Ullapool, handled shellfish caught by a local fisherman, cared for Highland cattle and visited a museum. Children deepened their knowledge of sea creatures and sea pollution, enjoyed singing and stories, and explored the Easter story through visitors to the setting. Children confidently and with expression recall this learning. Staff should continue to foster sustained partnerships to support children's learning. Parents can 'stay and play' at the nursery. They receive daily updates from the nursery staff's use of digital technology to enable parents to share their child's ELC experience. Staff are well placed to encourage further parents to play an active role in the curriculum. This includes through more family learning opportunities.

- Children learn skills for life and learning through routines and real-life experiences that help them understand the area in which they live. They are at the very early stages of developing digital skills. Staff should support children to develop a fuller range of digital skills to help them explore, create and connect to the world beyond their immediate experience.

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Learning, teaching and assessment	satisfactory

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 staff team work well together and have positive relationships with children and families. Their sensitive approaches help children to feel safe and ready to play. As a result, almost all children settle quickly, make friends and play well with each other.

- Staff have created a welcoming and nurturing environment. Children confidently access toys and resources, indoors and outdoors. Almost all include their friends in their play. Most children respond well to the available open-ended resources, displaying imagination and creativity in their play. The pace of the day can be overly slow, with periods of time when children are waiting together for the next activity to begin. As a next step, staff should review the balance between the activities and routines with which children engage as a whole group. Children should have more opportunities to lead their own learning. They would benefit from increased time to follow their own interests, while using the indoor and outdoor spaces more freely and independently.

- Children are familiar and comfortable with the well-established daily nursery routines. Staff ensure that in these routines children practice and apply their early literacy and numeracy skills. Children self-register using Makaton signing. Staff should introduce more leadership roles for children to help them develop their independence, sense of ownership and responsibility.

- Most children are keen and enthusiastic to talk about their play and learning. Almost all demonstrate good levels of engagement during together times and free play. Staff provide a range of play experiences in the outdoor area. As a result, children learn about their natural environment as they participate in gardening. Staff make good use of the unique local

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community to widen children's learning experiences. They should now review the continuous play provision on offer, across the indoor and outdoor spaces, to better meet the needs of all children. Staff need to provide provocations that promote increased challenge and curiosity for children. This includes more sensory activities that a few children require, and from which all children would benefit.

- Staff interactions are nurturing and caring, with staff at the early stages of using questioning and commentary to support children's learning. They value children's voice and plan responsively around children's interests. Staff capture children's ideas and engagement in experiences well through floorbooks, wall displays and learning journey folders. Staff would now benefit from support to develop ways to identify and formally record the individual next steps in learning for all children. Senior leaders and local authority officers should continue to support staff to learn from best practice in planning, tracking and monitoring and learn from other settings.

- Staff are at the early stages of using their observations of children's learning, developmental milestones and professional dialogue, to demonstrate children's progress over time. They have recently introduced a new tracking system linked to progression pathways and Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes. This is beginning to provide staff with a broad overview of what children have achieved in literacy and numeracy. Staff have plans to develop this approach further to create tracking information for each child. Senior leaders should continue to support staff to use their observations to track children's development and significant learning more effectively and robustly. An important next step for senior leaders and staff is to gather and maintain a more accurate and detailed picture of each child's learning and progress across the curriculum.

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Wellbeing, inclusion and equality	satisfactory

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 provide sensitive support to children to help them regulate their emotions. This is ensuring everyone is included and can engage in their learning and play. Staff's interactions with children are naturally nurturing, helping children form strong attachments. Staff have fun with children, and this helps foster positive relationships and an overall sense of wellbeing. Recently, children learned about keeping themselves safe through a planned programme. As a result, they can describe the importance of being kind, how to keep their body safe and have a developing awareness of 'stranger danger'. Staff are at the very early stages of helping children learn about their rights in meaningful and accessible ways. They could support this development by working collaboratively with children and colleagues across the school.

- Children attend ELC regularly within their chosen pattern of attendance. Staff carefully monitor children's attendance at nursery. They work sensitively with families to promote the benefits of early learning and childcare for each child.

- Most children engage confidently with the range of experiences, making choices about where they want to play within well-established routines. The majority of children are capable of assuming more responsibility, to build and extend their self-esteem, independence and confidence. This includes through accessing learning in an environment that makes creative use of space to take full account of the different needs of children. Staff need to provide children with more opportunities to explore, investigate, be creative, relax and be curious.

- Staff understand and recognise when children need additional support to help them play and learn. When required, staff seek advice from other professionals to help them offer the right

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support at the right time. At times, staff make well-considered adaptations to routines to take account of the range of children's needs. They are keen to continue to deepen their knowledge and understanding to help them meet better the diverse range of children's needs. Staff work together with parents and other professionals to develop plans to meet the specific care and learning needs of individual children. They now need to make more effective use of these plans to identify specific targets that help provide children with timely support that progresses children's learning. This should enable children's progress to be clearly demonstrated. A few children receive specialised teaching inputs to help them develop confidence and skills in communication. Staff are at the early stages of using assessment information to identify children who may benefit from focused inputs to support and challenge their learning.

- The headteacher and staff know children and families well and have extensive knowledge of what is important to the community in which children live. Staff treat children and their families with respect and kindness. As planned, they should audit and develop further approaches to promoting and celebrating diversity with children through a wider range of experiences and resources. Staff need to assist children develop an increased understanding of the world beyond their immediate experiences. Staff should build on Gàidhlig being part of children's identity to enable children's learning of language and culture. This would assist staff in meeting duties in the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, 2017.

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

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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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