

# Summarised inspection findings

**St Cyrus School Nursery Class**

Aberdeenshire Council

26 August 2025

## Key contextual information

St Cyrus Primary School Nursery Class is located within St Cyrus Primary School in the coastal village of St Cyrus in Aberdeenshire. The nursery class has one playroom and open access to an enclosed outdoor play area. The children also access the school gym and green spaces in the school grounds. Currently, the nursery class provides early learning and childcare to a maximum of sixteen children. Children aged three to those not yet attending primary school attend the nursery. At the time of inspection, there were eighteen children on the nursery roll. Supported by the headteacher, the recently appointed early years senior practitioner leads a well-established team of two experienced practitioners and an early years support worker.

### 1.3 Leadership of change

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

- The nursery team works well together and has created a calm, nurturing ethos. As a result, children are settled and happy. The school and nursery values of 'successful, together, active, respected and safe,' are promoted through the phrase 'reach for the stars'. Practitioners demonstrate these values well through their daily practice. They make the values engaging for children and families through the 'star' floorbook. This demonstrates the ways that the nursery values underpin children's experiences, through their pictures and comments.
- Practitioners are keen to improve. They are reflective about their practice, and they contribute to priorities for the nursery improvement plan. They work as a team to evaluate aspects of the learning environment, such as using playdough and construction. This year, they used national and local guidance to evaluate children's experiences at mealtimes. As a result, the lunchtime routine is now an enjoyable experience that supports children's independence. The team is aware of the importance of involving children in evaluating their experiences and listening to their views. For example, staff listened to children's opinions about the change to the playdough station. The team should continue to support children to take on leadership roles within the setting. There is also scope for senior leaders to further develop leadership roles for practitioners linked to improvement priorities. As correctly identified, staff should continue to encourage families and children to share their views on areas for improvement.
- Practitioners recognise the importance of the professional learning they undertake. Their professional learning supports them to reflect on and improve children's experiences in the setting. For example, they speak confidently about the training they undertook on inclusive communication approaches. They describe their experience of implementing strategies from that training and the positive impact these have had on improving outcomes for children. They ensure that their professional development activities are effective in leading to improvement. For example, staff used a motivating podcast on high quality interactions to improve their practice in this area.

## 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

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

- Practitioners provide a wide range of motivating learning experiences for children. As a result, almost all children are engaged in their learning for sustained periods of time. Children have open access to a well-resourced outdoor area, and they make choices about where to play throughout their day. There is scope for staff to develop further the learning environment to include a more challenging range of opportunities for children to apply their skills. The team should also consider the opportunities available to children to express their own ideas, thoughts and feelings through expressive arts experiences.
- Practitioners make good use of the varied learning spaces available in the school grounds. For example, they ensure that children have regular visits to a small, wooded area where they are encouraged to problem-solve and be curious. In that environment, children concentrate for sustained periods of time as they build dens and explore the natural environment. The team support children's curiosity well. For example, when a child found a snail shell, this led to a discussion about thrushes breaking snail shells on stones. The team also ensures that children have regular walks around the community and visits to the beach. This ensures that children are becoming familiar with their local environment.
- Children confidently play games and draw on the interactive whiteboard. They are supported to research their interests and capture their own learning using digital devices. They demonstrate, with enthusiasm, how to manoeuvre the remote-controlled car outdoors.
- Practitioners are warm and nurturing in their interactions with children. They are highly responsive to children's needs and interests. The team effectively support all children to access nursery experiences. As a result of staff's respectful, supportive approaches, children are confident and well-settled. Practitioners engage children skilfully to talk about their learning. They encourage children to take forward their enquiries and extend their thinking, through the effective use of commentary and questioning.
- Practitioners observe children as part of daily practice and capture significant learning in children's learning folders. Children are proud of their work and enjoy sharing their folders with adults. The team ensures they have opportunities to share them with their families. Comments in the folders demonstrate how much families appreciate this. The team know the children well and identify appropriate individual next steps from their observations. Practitioners ensure children have opportunities to take this learning forward. They should now consider including a wider range of skills in the next steps they identify.
- The team plans regularly and involves children in recording their learning experiences in a floorbook. Practitioners have correctly identified the need to continue to develop their approaches to planning for learning. They now need to develop a more rigorous approach to

responsive planning with children. As they develop their learning environment and their planning approaches, they need to provide children with appropriate levels of challenge. This should ensure all children make the best possible progress.

## 2.2 Curriculum: Learning and developmental pathways

- Practitioners provide a varied curriculum that is play-based, with a focus on outdoor learning experiences. The curriculum is enhanced significantly by visits into the local community and beyond. Practitioners have a sound understanding of the importance of play and of their role in supporting progression in children's learning.
- Practitioners work well with teaching staff in the school. They plan collaboratively and provide children in the nursery and in the early stages of primary, fortnightly opportunities, to work and play together. Senior leaders have identified further opportunities to develop working across early level, in order to promote sustained progression of learning.
- Transitions from home to nursery are well managed and are positive for both children and their families. Children are invited for settling in days. Parents speak positively about the enhanced transitions for children who may take longer to settle. Throughout their time at nursery, children have regular opportunities to visit the primary school to use the gym and wider outdoor areas. As a result, children become very familiar with the school environment. In the summer term, there is a well-established transition programme to support children moving into P1. As a result, children settle well and are ready to engage in their learning.

## 2.7 Partnerships: Impact on children and families – parental engagement

- Practitioners have close, supportive relationships with families. The staff team is keen to welcome families into the nursery. They encourage them to share their skills and experiences to enhance children's learning. For example, children have benefitted from a visit from a parent bringing in new lambs, and another parent leading a music session. Parents join their children in play at the nursery when they receive a 'golden ticket'. They appreciate the opportunity to find out more about their child's nursery experiences. Children take home books and games from the nursery lending library to share with their parents. Practitioners keep families well-informed about children's nursery life through daily conversations and at regular, well-attended open evenings. Practitioners share information on children's experiences with families through newsletters.
- Children benefit from initiatives which encourage family learning. For example, a baking kit was sent home to every family which contained a recipe and ingredients to make scones. This was supported by a local business. The team ensures that families are informed about the focus of their intentional planning. They provide a helpful 'talk at home' sheet with ideas for families to support learning at home. There is scope for staff to increase opportunities further for parents to engage in supporting children'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. At the time of the inspection, there were no identified areas for development.

### 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

- Practitioners have a very good understanding of the importance of children's emotional wellbeing. They have developed trusting, positive relationships with the children and their families. Through sensitive interactions, practitioners support children to understand their own emotions. They promote strategies to help children to regulate their feelings and manage conflict. As a result, children are confident in trying to reach a resolution to problems and disagreements themselves. Practitioners sensitively step in with further support, where needed. Practitioners provide positive role models for children and almost all children are developing friendships and play well together.
- Practitioners are at the early stages of using the language of children's rights with the nursery children. Following training, the team decided to begin this work by involving families. They delivered a successful session focused on raising awareness of children's rights to the parents. They should now continue to embed children's rights meaningfully into practice.
- The team effectively use the vocabulary of their values of successful, together, active, respected and safe, which reflect the wellbeing indicators. They discuss these in meaningful contexts with children as they play, for example while climbing trees or eating snack. The children can talk knowledgeably about keeping themselves safe, healthy and active. Practitioners should continue to embed the vocabulary of the wellbeing indicators into daily practice.
- All practitioners are clear about their statutory duties in relation to early learning and childcare and keeping children safe. Children's individual health and wellbeing needs are met very well as a result of well-planned, effective daily practice. Practitioners gather information about children in personal plans, organised using the wellbeing indicators. Where barriers to learning exist, they work with families to develop individual support plans. They update these plans in consultation with parents and, where appropriate, support agencies. This is ensuring that children's wellbeing is well-supported. They understand children's learning needs and apply strategies very effectively to support individual children's learning and engagement. They value and celebrate the progress made by all children. As a next step, practitioners should ensure that support plans provide appropriate, measurable targets focused on learning for individual children.
- Mealtimes are calm and relaxed. Children are encouraged to be independent. They help to prepare snack and set out dishes and cutlery for lunch themselves. Children are kind and considerate, helping each other with serving food and pouring drinks. Practitioners are thoughtful and nurturing in ensuring that all children are included at mealtimes. Children know they are respected and listened to, and they enjoy sharing thoughts and experiences as they sit round the tables. As a result, mealtimes are sociable, positive experiences.

- Practitioners have created an inclusive ethos in which all children are welcomed and supported. To promote children's understanding of the wider world, the team should now explore broadening children's awareness of different cultures in relevant, meaningful ways.

### 3.2 Securing children's progress

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 good progress in early language and literacy. Most children speak confidently to adults and to their friends and are keen to share thoughts and feelings. Children choose to look at books independently, ask for stories from an adult and almost all listen well. They retell familiar texts and create their own stories as they draw and role play. They sing songs and would now benefit from more opportunities to engage with rhyme. Almost all children engage in mark making experiences. A minority are starting to write their names. A few write meaningful words, with the support of practitioners. Children would benefit from further opportunities to engage with environmental print and write for a purpose, through nursery routines and experiences.
- Almost all children are making good progress in mathematics and numeracy. They use mathematical language, comparing sizes, naming shapes and using positional language confidently. They enjoy sorting, matching and exploring patterns as they play. Most children count confidently within 10. A few children explore larger numbers. Children enjoy problem-solving. For example, they were motivated when working out how to release toys frozen into an ice block. A minority of children talk about time in meaningful contexts, for example cooking their mud kitchen cakes for 'five seconds'.
- All children are making good progress in health and wellbeing. They are motivated by the physical play opportunities available to them. They develop their skills well, as they build dens, use the hammock and balance on a plank seesaw. They develop their fine motor skills well, as they use tools, cut fruit for snack, and mark make. Most children are confident and resilient, persevering when they meet challenges and demonstrating high levels of independence.
- Almost all children demonstrate enthusiasm for learning as they play. Staff's observations of children in individual learning folders show that they are making good progress over time. Senior leaders have developed a tracking system and value the termly discussions with practitioners about children's progress. They should now consider what measures practitioners are using to arrive at their judgements and continue to develop approaches to tracking learning.
- The team value children's achievements from home, and link these with their 'reach for the stars' work on values. Parents are encouraged to record children's achievements from home on a star. These are then shared on the achievement wall and celebrated in the nursery. Children are proud to have their achievements from home on display in the nursery.

- Practitioners know their families and the community in which they live very well. Staff provide parents with the opportunity for a 'cuppa and catch up' whenever they want to discuss any issue with a member of staff. Parents value this. The team support families with access to practical support such as a foodbank and pre-loved clothing.

## 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.