

Summarised inspection findings

Lochnorris Supported Learning Unit

East Ayrshire Council

22 September 2026

Key contextual information

Lochnorris Supported Learning Unit (Lochnorris SLU) is a special primary school located in the Barony Campus in East Ayrshire. It is exclusively for children with additional support needs. Children are placed at the school by the local authority, based on assessment of their needs.

In addition to Lochnorris SLU, the campus hosts Robert Burns Academy, Lochnorris Primary School, Hillside School, and Cherry Trees Early Childhood Centre. The leadership team consists of a headteacher and a principal teacher. The headteacher was appointed in November 2025 and leads Hillside School in addition to Lochnorris SLU.

At the time of inspection, Lochnorris SLU had 45 children on its roll. Children are taught across five classes. Four classrooms are located in Lochnorris Primary School and one classroom is located in Robert Burns Academy. Around 70% of children live within Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 1 and 2. 47% of children are registered for free school meals.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment	weak
This indicator focuses on ensuring high-quality learning experiences for all children and young people. It highlights the importance of highly-skilled staff who work with children, young people and others to ensure learning is motivating and meaningful. Effective use of assessment by staff and learners ensures children and young people maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are: - learning and engagement - quality of teaching - effective use of assessment - planning, tracking and monitoring	

- Staff work well with almost all children to develop and sustain safe and supportive relationships. Staff understand children’s needs and use this knowledge to provide helpful support to them. This helps most children regulate their emotions well and focus on their learning activities positively. Almost all children are confident in approaching staff for support when they require help. They are supportive and show kindness towards each other when undertaking learning activities in the majority of lessons.
- Across the school day, children too frequently experience interruptions to their support where staff have other duties to undertake out with the class. During these periods, teachers are unable to ensure that all children receive direct teaching and support to undertake learning activities. As a result, children experience periods where they are not supported well enough to engage fully with intended learning activities. The headteacher should work with staff to ensure that classrooms have the correct level of staff support available to children.
- Staff have been successful in providing the appropriate level of help for children’s behaviour, assisting them to stay regulated in class and other learning environments. Staff engage positively with professional learning that helps them understand approaches to de-escalate situations where children present with unsafe behaviours. For almost all children, staff’s approaches have been successful in helping them to re-engage with learning quickly following periods of disruption. For a few children, there is a need for senior leaders and staff to develop

further interventions and supports to help them access learning safely. A few children present with distressed behaviours across the school day. During these times, the children require spaces to help them calm and regulate that offers them privacy and supports their emotional wellbeing. Senior leaders, supported by local authority colleagues, should consider how to provide appropriate spaces for children who become distressed or display dysregulated behaviours, to help them regulate their emotions better.

- In a minority of classes, teachers provide individualised activities that are matched well to children's needs. For example, teachers use appropriate levels of differentiation or suitably individualised tasks when children are learning new sounds. Teachers develop these activities successfully to support children's understanding of sounds and build upon their prior learning. In too many learning activities, children have already developed the skills and knowledge required to complete the assigned tasks. This is leading to children repeating learning rather than extending their knowledge and skills. Teachers need to ensure that children build consistently on their prior learning and experience appropriately challenging activities across all of their learning.
- Overall, children experience too much variability in their learning experiences. Senior leaders and teachers need to continue to improve the overall quality of teaching and learning. The headteacher has made a positive start to working with teachers to improve the consistency of teaching approaches. For example, teachers are now in the initial stages of setting and meeting the expectations of what makes a good, well-structured lesson. Teachers are working positively with the headteacher to develop further purposeful play-based activities. This is beginning to provide children with opportunities to reinforce their skills and activities to promote independent application of their skills. For example, they are beginning to adopt a whole school approach to a 'play and pull' pedagogy which supports learning through play and consolidation activities. As a result, children are beginning to experience an increased amount of purposeful learning across the school day.
- The majority of children have their communication preferences met well. However, there is a need for staff to develop communication approaches further so that all children benefit from their learning opportunities and participate in learning fully. Senior leaders, teachers and support staff should continue with their plans to increase their awareness and application of a range of communication approaches. Teachers would now value and benefit from time to learn alongside colleagues from similar additional support needs schools. This will help them continue to develop their approaches to learning and interventions specifically tailored to the individual diverse needs of children.
- Across all classes, teachers use digital technology appropriately to introduce learning and promote motivation to learn. They use digital devices to help a majority of children become more independent learners. Teachers provide children with electronic writing tablets to help them record their work. Children are also encouraged to use magnifying technology to help them read.
- Teachers work well with the majority of children to help them understand the purpose of their learning. As a result, the majority of children are motivated to learn. In a minority of lessons, teachers use questioning effectively to help children process what learning will be undertaken. This helps children be inquisitive and understand how they can succeed in their learning. However, in other activities, teachers limit children's opportunities to become more

independent in their thinking and application of skills. Overall, teachers need to consider further their approaches to help all children to engage in developing higher order thinking skills, appropriate to their level.

- In the minority of activities, teachers use informal assessment strategies well to check children's understanding. Teachers now need to continue with plans to develop ways to help children demonstrate their knowledge and understanding, skills, attributes and capabilities, particularly in relation to literacy. This will help teachers to identify, with increasing accuracy, the next steps for children's learning. They should work to ensure that assessment information directly informs planning for all curriculum areas. The headteacher and teachers remain at the early stages of improving their approaches to assessment. For example, the principal teacher has begun to hold useful meetings with teachers to discuss assessment of children's progress in relation to literacy and numeracy. Additionally, teachers are beginning to use a practical tool to help them assess what child can say and understand in relation to language milestones. They should continue to build upon this positive start and develop further their confidence in identifying children's levels of language development and their progress.
- Teachers do not always set appropriately individual targets for children to inform their planning of personalised learning activities. Teachers should focus more clearly on individualised learning programmes targeting the areas where children require additional support beyond the planned curriculum. Additionally, teachers should strengthen their planning so that it builds better on prior learning. This will help staff ensure children access planned learning with appropriate levels of support and challenge. Teachers should ensure that individualised learning programmes have outcome focused targets which help them to measure, track and monitor the progress children make.

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.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

weak

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Overall children's attainment in literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. Most children are capable of achieving more and should be provided with increased challenge in their learning. A minority of children work at pre-early level of Curriculum for Excellence in literacy and numeracy. A majority of children work at early level in literacy and numeracy. A minority of children work at first level in literacy and numeracy. A few children work at second level in reading, listening and talking, and numeracy.

Attainment in literacy and English

- The majority of children make satisfactory progress in literacy and English. A few children make good progress. Most children are capable of achieving more.

Listening and talking

- Across all levels, most children listen attentively in class to adults and their peers. They use spoken language and signs well to communicate with others. At pre-early level children respond well to a range of stimuli. At early level most children speak clearly when asking or answering questions. They enjoy listening to stories and songs. Most children at early level take turns when listening to each other. Most children working at first level ask and answer questions appropriately. They share their ideas when prompted to contribute these to discussions. Children need to develop their communication, listening and talking skills further to support them to contribute more meaningfully to class discussions.

Reading

- At pre-early level, most children match objects using photographs or pictures appropriately. They join in with actions in stories or songs. At early level, most children read simple words and phrases from left to right appropriately. They enjoy exploring features of characters in stories. At first level, most children read clearly with expression. They read a range of texts of interest to them. Most children at early level are able to describe why they like a particular story. Across all levels, most children need to develop their reading skills further. Most children at first level need to be challenged to read longer and access more advanced texts.

Writing

- At pre-early level, children are developing their fine motor and pre-writing skills appropriately. At early level, children write short words. They use these to create a simple instruction. At first level, most children write simple sentences to describe characters in a book. A few children at

first level successfully identify common punctuation marks. At early and first level, all children need to develop their writing skills further. They need to write a wider range of texts for a variety of purposes.

Attainment in numeracy and mathematics

- The majority of children make satisfactory progress in numeracy and mathematics. A few children make good progress. Most children are capable of achieving more.

Number, money and measure

- At pre-early level, children recognise simple amounts such as none or one. They recognise numbers in daily use. At early level, most children use concrete materials appropriately to count. They use daily timetables to know what they will be doing next. At first level, a minority of children add three-digit numbers. They use decimal points appropriately to convert pence to pounds. A minority of children at first level convert millilitres to litres correctly. They solve simple problems using money. Children need to develop their number, money and measure skills further in real-life contexts.

Shape, position and movement

- At pre-early level, children enjoy developing their understanding of shapes through play with concrete objects. At early level, children name two-dimensional shapes and count the number of sides each has. At first level, most children name three-dimensional objects. Across all levels, children need to develop further their understanding of all aspects of position and movement.

Information handling

- At first level, children use tally tables to gather information. They use this information to answer questions on how many of each item they observed. Across the school, all children need to develop their skills further in all aspects of information handling.

Attainment over time

- The headteacher is not yet able to provide valid and reliable data evidencing how well children attain over time. Teachers should now gather evidence of children's attainment over time across all curriculum areas.
- Teachers monitor children's progress against the personal targets in their individualised learning programmes. Targets are limited to literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Teachers do not yet track other curriculum areas. Senior leaders are not yet quality assuring children's individual learning programmes or the quality of the targets being set. Teachers need to be supported to develop plans and targets which provide them with meaningful information on children's progress over time.
- Teachers use a local authority tracking tool to record children's progress within literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Teachers do not yet have a strong understanding of national standards. As a result, the information recorded is not reliable. Teachers need to develop their skills further in analysing data on children's attainment to support them to make accurate judgements on how well children are attaining.
- Senior leaders act promptly if a child is absent, in line with local authority guidelines. They work well with partners to support most children to improve or sustain their attendance over time. At the time of inspection, the average attendance was 90%. A few children continue to have low

attendance rates at the school. A few children remain on part-time placements for lengthy periods of time due to specific additional support needs. The headteacher, with support from local authority colleagues, should continue work to reduce any barriers to children accessing learning which are a result of their additional support needs.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Teachers celebrate children's achievements during whole school monthly assemblies. Children in the upper primary stages benefit from leadership roles, being part of the SLU pupil council and taking a lead role in preparing school assemblies. They are increasingly confident in speaking to unfamiliar people and share with them the positive work they do within the school. Children are proud that they have achieved a national award for their work on respecting children's rights. Parents share achievements from home through the shared digital platform, promoting positive home school links. Senior leaders should continue to gather and analyse participation and achievement data more effectively. This will help them ensure no child is at risk of missing valuable experiences. As a next step, staff should track children's wider achievements more thoroughly and link this to a skills framework. This will enable them to identify the skills children gain during their time at school.

Equity for all learners

- The headteacher and staff understand the socio-economic challenges in their community. Prior to the current headteacher taking up post, it was agreed that Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) should be used to fund additional support staff. The use of additional staff aimed to support children's engagement in learning and capacity to cope with transitions in school. Senior leaders now need to ensure that it is clear how the use of PEF impacts measurably on children's outcomes and in reducing poverty related attainment gaps. They should strengthen further approaches to gather evidence on the impact of PEF on identified children.
- Senior leaders were supported well by East Ayrshire Council and Ayrshire360 to help children access swimming lessons and activities as part of the school's summer programme. As a result, children gained access to activities that they may not otherwise have experienced. In addition, parents report that it has developed their confidence in taking their child to enjoy public facilities, such as swimming pools.
- Children are not yet benefitting fully from engaging in a range of outdoor learning activities, both in the extensive school grounds and in the neighbouring areas. They require more opportunities to improve their understanding of their own community, experience nature and be more physically active. Furthermore, it would support children have equitable learning experiences, similar to other campus users. The headteacher, supported by the local authority, should review the use of learning and recreation spaces. They should ensure children have equitable access to areas out with the classroom to support learning and social opportunities. They should consider making use of alternative learning spaces within the school for some children who find accessing a class all day challenging.

Other relevant evidence

- Senior leaders, supported by the local authority, should work with campus leaders to improve the learning environments for children. Children's classrooms are spread across the campus, which is limiting children's potential for interactions with peers beyond their classroom. There are limited play and social areas suitable for children with sensory needs to access. As a result, a few children opt out of playground experiences due to the busyness of the environment.
- Senior leaders should work with teachers to review periods during the school week where no planned or progressive learning is taking place. This will support staff to meet better children's full entitlements to education and has the potential to help children improve or accelerate their attainment.
- Children are not being considered for a coordinated support plan (CSP) in line with national expectations. Senior leaders should work with partners, parents and, where appropriate, children and young people to consider whether they meet the criteria for a CSP.
- The school submitted information relating to compliance with the revised Nutritional Regulations 2020 and key duties as required by The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007. The Health and Nutrition Inspector (HNI) discussed this information with relevant staff and children. In addition, the HNI examined documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole school approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of children through food in school. Minor areas for improvement have been agreed with the school and the school meals provider.

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.