Early learning and childcare (ELC) setting shared inspection report

Orphir Community Nursery

Orkney Islands Council
24 November 2026

In October 2026, a team of inspectors from HMIE and the Care Inspectorate visited Orphir Community Nursery. During our visit, we talked to parents/carers and children and worked closely with the head of setting and staff.

Key inspection findings

- Staff have positive warm and nurturing relationships with children. As a result, children are happy, enjoy their experience and settle well on leaving their parents. Moving forward staff should work together to develop a more consistent approach to writing personal plans.
- Children experience a range of learning both indoors, outdoors and in the community. As planned, staff should develop ways to encourage children to be independent in their learning. Staff have taken positive steps to improve how they interact with children through their play. As a result, children make good progress in their learning.
- Staff are aware of the need to make better connections between planning, assessing and recording of children's progress. This should help support staff to provide appropriate challenge for individual children and ensure they make progress at an appropriate pace.
- Staff share learning well with each other and with their partner school. They have worked to enhance approaches to storytelling and interactions. Staff should now evaluate to what extent their professional learning is having an impact on children's experiences.

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

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Summary of inspection findings

Key contextual Information

Orphir Nursery Class is part of Orphir Community School and is situated within the main school building. There is one playroom and a spacious outdoor play area. The setting is registered for a maximum of 15 children at any one time. It caters for children aged three to those not yet attending school. There are currently 11 children on the roll. Children attend across a range of attendance patterns to receive their entitlement to 1140 hours of early learning and childcare. The setting is open from 9.30 am to 3.30 pm during term time. The headteacher of the school is the registered manager of the setting. He is supported by a lead early years practitioner who has day-to-day responsibility for the setting, a full-time early years practitioner and one part-time early years practitioner.

Leadership: Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

- Children experienced a calm and welcoming environment. Staff worked well together and communicated clearly throughout the day. They knew children's stages of development and described how they supported individual interests through play.

- Staff were flexible to meet children's needs, they maintained an awareness of where children were and shared information to support safe supervision. They adapted planned tasks when children wanted to go outdoors, helping them access this experience safely. Working patterns supported continuity of care across the day, with an additional staff member available at lunchtime. This also allowed staff to take breaks while children continued to receive support.

- The lead practitioner recognised individual staff strengths and encouraged staff to build on them. For example, staff shared learning about engaging storytelling and modelled positive interactions with children. Staff also accessed training linked to their interests, including outdoor learning. These approaches helped sustain staff enthusiasm and supported positive experiences for children.

- Staff used professional development meetings to identify learning needs and reflect on their practice. Meetings within the service and with a sister service provided opportunities to share ideas and experiences. Staff said they felt supported. They described recent training in nurturing nature, additional support needs and nursery mathematics. They were motivated to apply their learning and had identified emotion coaching and neurodiversity as future training needs.

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Going forward they should evaluate how their learning impacts on children's experiences.

- Reflection and self-evaluation helped staff identify further development needs, including the use of spaces and outdoor resources. They planned to develop their skills in observation and assessment. This should support them in identifying children's progress and plan appropriate support. We identified that further development of effective record keeping in personal plans and chronologies would also be of benefit. Improvement in this area will further support a continuity of care and help safeguard children.

- Staff were registered with appropriate professional bodies and understood their responsibilities for maintaining registration.

- The service covered planned and unplanned absences by extending existing staff hours where possible. Supply staff could be used when needed, although availability was sometimes limited. School staff could provide short periods of cover, such as when a child needed changing. This maintained minimum staffing ratios, but unfamiliar cover had potential to affect continuity in children's relationships.

- At times, staff focused on one group's activity. This meant some children received fewer interactions to support their engagement and learning. Leaders should review deployment during activities, so children consistently benefit from responsive support.

- Overall, children benefited from a calm environment, safe supervision and staff who responded flexibly to their choices. However, interactions did not consistently support every child's engagement and learning. Staff should strengthen observation, assessment and record keeping, and establish how professional learning improves children's experiences.

Children play and learn: Learning, teaching and assessment

- All staff have caring, positive relationships with children. There are very friendly, respectful relationships among children. As a result, children are happy and secure in the nursery. Staff have developed predictable routines and children are clear about the flow of the day. Children settle quickly at times of transition, such as coming into nursery and getting ready for lunch or snack. This leads to a calm ethos across the nursery.

- Staff have created an attractive learning environment both indoors and outdoors. They review and update the environments with children regularly. For example, staff recently consulted children and changed an area into a popular post office

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with stampers, stationery and a post box. Staff are committed to allowing children to lead learning through encouraging schematic play. As a result, most children sustain engagement well in the range of learning experiences on offer. Most children are developing skills of curiosity and creativity well as they play in the outdoor area. In moving forward, staff should ensure children experience a better balance of adult-led and child-led learning. This should help ensure individual children make appropriate progress in their learning. Staff should now develop more opportunities to extend children's learning using digital technology.

- Staff have focused their professional learning on improving interactions with children through play. As a result, all staff, use commentary well and model vocabulary clearly to support children to develop their own communication and vocabulary skills. All staff should continue to develop further their questioning skills to extend children's learning and challenge them further. Staff are highly responsive to children's interests and plan responsively child-led and child-initiated learning. This results in children being highly motivated in the learning experiences on offer.

- All staff make useful observations of children's learning which they record well in individual learning journals. They use information gathered helpfully to support them to identify next steps in learning for each child in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Staff have made a good start to improving the quality of observations. As planned, the headteacher and staff now need to ensure that observations consistently focus more on children's significant learning. Over time, this should help provide a coherent overview of children's progress.

- As they move forward staff should increase the use of the language of learning with children. This should help children to begin to talk about what they are learning rather than the activity. In addition, it should help support children have greater ownership of their own learning.

- The headteacher and staff use the local authority tracking tool and developmental milestones to effectively to track children's progress in learning across curriculum areas. As planned, staff should strengthen links between observation, planning of day-to-day learning and tracking of progress. This more connected approach should support greater continuity and progression in learning.

- There is a need to plan an overview of the totality of the curriculum for children over their time in nursery. This should support staff in providing children with a breadth of experiences across the two years and should limit duplication of learning.

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Children are supported to achieve: Nurturing care and support

- Children confidently approached staff to share experiences, invite them into play and seek support. Kind, nurturing relationships helped them express their views and make choices. Families described positive relationships with staff, who knew children well and recognised when individual support was needed.

- Children were beginning to learn about their rights and to identify and express their feelings. Staff had plans to continue this work to help children develop their understanding of emotions and support their self-regulation.

- Families valued flexible visits and regular communication when their children started nursery. Staff used agreed strategies for children who needed support with daily transitions, such as going home or moving between activities, and reported that these had impacted positively on children's confidence in daily routines. To support the move to Primary 1, staff worked with the Primary 1 teacher. For example, by sharing tracking information and planning visits to the dining hall for lunch.

- Children enjoyed relaxed, sociable mealtimes, Food appeared appetising and nutritious, with fruit and vegetables offered at meals and snacks, supporting children's health. Staff sat with them, supported their safety and encouraged conversation. More could be made of opportunities for children to develop independence and choice during mealtimes. Greater involvement in planning and preparing snacks, serving food and cutting meals would help develop these skills.

- Personal plans recorded children's medical needs, emergency contacts, care and learning needs, and agreed support strategies, supporting staff to promote children's health and wellbeing. Plans contained initial information on identified needs and where other agencies were providing support. Staff worked well with these agencies, supporting continuity of support. However, plans did not consistently record children's progress or review support strategies, making it harder to see whether support remained responsive. For example, one plan still described transition support after the child had become more confident with the nursery routine. Staff should keep plans current and develop their use of wellbeing indicators to support a holistic approach. Similarly, while chronologies recorded significant events in children's lives, they did not clearly show the actions taken, subsequent reviews or outcomes for children. Recording these would provide a clearer account of the support provided and reduce the risk of important information being missed.

- Parents were welcomed into the service at collection, but busy handovers potentially limited opportunities to discuss their children's individual experiences. An online platform was used to share general activities and events, while learning journeys recorded more detail about children's learning. This information sharing

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helped parents to be involved in their child's care and learning. Staff recognised that parents could be more involved and had included this in their improvement plan.

- Overall, children benefited from nurturing relationships, support during transitions and care that reflected their individual needs. To strengthen this support, staff should review personal plans more consistently, ensure chronologies show actions and outcomes, give children greater independence at mealtimes and create more opportunities for families to discuss their children's experiences.

Children are supported to achieve: Children's progress

- Staff work well with parents to ensure they know children well and can support their social and emotional needs effectively. For example, they work together to support toilet training and manage dietary preferences. Staff encourage parents to stay and play with children to help them settle. They provide regular opportunities for parents to meet with staff or inform them of any changes to their child's needs. As a result, staff meet the needs of all children well.

- Staff ensure a clear focus on developing early literacy and numeracy skills through a wide range of activities. This includes through indoor activities, group time and within the very popular outdoor area. Staff provide children with regular opportunities to explore the wider outdoors through the nature / nurture programme. They provide children with a wide variety of opportunities to apply their learning in real life contexts. For example, children benefit from visits to the Kirk Café and trips on the bus and ferry. Consequently, most children are making good progress in their learning and development. Staff plan to review how they record children's progress and identify next steps. This should help ensure a clearer focus on ensuring children's learning moves forward at an appropriate pace for individuals.

- Staff work well with parents to ensure they identify children's barriers to learning effectively. They link with other agencies such as the health visitor and speech and language therapists to help support children. The local authority family team provide sensitive support to families as required. Staff know children well and provide effective interventions to ensure children settle, enjoy nursery and make good progress in their learning.

- Staff make positive use of developmental milestones and the local authority tracking system to monitor children's progress in learning. They make good use of their links with the partner school nursery class to help moderate the standard expected of children at the early level.

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- Parents and staff work well together to identify and celebrate children's wider achievements from home. Staff encourage parents to share with the nursery achievements from home using an online tool. The headteacher shares nursery children's achievements on the wall in the main school building. As a result, children are proud of their achievements and are keen to try new things.

- Staff know children and their families very well which supports them in providing equitable provision for all. They have strong, positive relationships with families and they signpost outside agency supports as required. Staff ensure all children and parents have appropriate help to participate in the life of the nursery and make positive progress in their learning. They provide children with books to encourage literacy development at home and ensure equitable access to resources. As a result, children affected by socio-economic circumstances make good progress in their learning and development.

- Staff work well with parents to provide flexible attendance at nursery to meet family needs. A significant number of parents choose for their child to attend nursery part-time. Staff should continue to work with parents to encourage uptake of the 1140 hours for all children.

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. Areas for development have been agreed with the ELC setting and the education authority.

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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HM Inspector

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