

**HMIE**

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

Summarised inspection findings

Balmedie Primary School Nursery Class

Aberdeenshire 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

Balmedie School Nursery sits in the village of Balmedie, a coastal village of Aberdeenshire Council. The nursery serves children and families from the local area and from wider afield. It is registered for 32 children at any one time. Currently there are 58 children on the roll. Children can attend the nursery over two models. These include morning and afternoon sessions between the hours of 8am until 6pm, 49 weeks of the year.

The nursery is situated within Balmedie Primary School grounds and includes one large indoor playroom, a cloakroom area and toilets. Children have direct access to a large garden throughout the day.

The early years senior practitioner (EYSP) is the registered manager and has recently been appointed to the role. She is supported by two part-time and one full-time early years lead practitioners (EYLP), six early years practitioners (EYP) and an early years support worker (EYSW). The acting headteacher of the primary school supports the EYSP in her role.

Curriculum	weak
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	

- The nursery does not yet have a clear curriculum rationale that explains the purpose, values and principles to inform learning within the setting. As a result, staff lack a clear curriculum framework to guide their practice. They are unable to ensure learning consistently meets all children's needs, interests and rights. Senior leaders and staff should now progress at pace with their plans to develop a shared curriculum rationale. They should ensure this rationale is informed by relevant research, and the local community context. As planned, staff should develop their understanding of the purposes and values that shape children's learning and why these experiences matter. This should include aligning their curriculum planning more clearly with the principles of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). Staff need support to design learning that connects meaningfully to children's interests and experiences. Importantly, staff need to strengthen their confidence in planning a curriculum that meets the needs of all children.

- Staff plan learning mainly within literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. They plan learning well in these areas through approaches such as outdoor learning, community walks and refreshed environments that promote children's curiosity and creativity. However, staff now need to plan learning that reflects the full breadth of the CfE. They need to ensure learning opportunities are planned for children to develop a wider range of skills and make progress in their learning over time. To strengthen curriculum planning and progression, senior leaders should now progress plans to embed children's rights more clearly. They must prioritise children's voices and support staff to recognise children as active participants in their learning. There is a need to ensure that curriculum planning reflects children's interests, experiences and aspirations, and supports meaningful progress for all children. Staff should also help children experience learning that is engaging, relevant and inclusive. This includes ensuring children experience continuity and progression in their learning as they move into, within and beyond the nursery.
- Staff work well with parents to gather a wide range of information about children's likes, interests and needs when they begin their nursery experience. Staff now need to make more effective use of this information. They must use this to inform meaningful curriculum planning and relevant learning experiences that respond to individual children. A next step is to support parents' involvement as meaningful partners in their child's learning.
- Staff work with a small number of partners, including parents and community organisations, to support children's learning and wellbeing. For example, a local community partner provides gardening experiences that help children develop curiosity and responsibility as they care for the natural environment. However, partnership working to strengthen learning is not yet sufficiently planned well or embedded across the curriculum. As planned, senior leaders need to support staff to develop a shared and well understood approach to partnership working. This includes more purposeful joint planning that makes effective use of community-based experiences to help children develop new skills and apply their learning. Senior leaders and staff need to strengthen partnership approaches to enhance the quality of learning experiences, and environments. Planned learning now needs to build children's understanding, encourage their exploration of new ideas and develop their key skills for life and learning.

Learning, teaching and assessment	weak
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	

- Staff build warm, respectful relationships with children. They welcome them and their families into the nursery in a friendly and inclusive way. Children who are new to the nursery are supported sensitively by staff who respond appropriately to their needs. These positive relationships create a supportive environment in which children feel safe and valued. Children play well together. They are beginning to cooperate and show kindness towards their peers. Staff should now make more consistent and purposeful use of visual prompts and shared language to support children when they have different ideas about play. Staff should support children to express their feelings, understand social situations and manage changes more independently. A next step is to help children feel more confident during transitions throughout the day.
- Overall, staff interactions with children are calm and positive. They plan a range of interactions, experiences and spaces indoors and outdoors, providing children with varied opportunities to explore and make choices. However, interactions are too often adult-led and do not always build effectively on children's ideas. Staff almost always miss opportunities to use planned experiences and environments to respond effectively to children's interests, support enquiry and curiosity, or deepen learning. As a result, opportunities for children to lead their learning and explore their interests are limited. Senior leaders must support staff to build confidence in using open-ended questions and engaging in meaningful dialogue. Staff require further support to recognise and respond appropriately to children's individual learning needs through skilled observation and meaningful responses to children's voices. Staff should encourage children to play an active role in shaping their learning and ensure their ideas and interests support progress.

- Staff use learner journals to record children's experiences in the nursery. While some examples of significant learning are included in these, staff's approaches to recording children's learning are inconsistent. Most learner journals do not yet capture children's learning journey effectively or reflect their voices, ideas and thinking over time. As a result, learner journals have limited impact in helping children reflect on their learning or meaningfully influence planning. Staff should develop a shared understanding of the purpose of learner journals as a tool for listening to children and documenting their learning over time. They should take account of the views of children, parents, colleagues and partners consistently to inform meaningful planning and effective next steps for learning. Staff need support to ensure that learning is appropriately challenging for all children and builds consistently on what they know and can do.
- With the support of the local authority, senior leaders must urgently develop a clear and shared overview of all children's individual progress. Current systems for tracking and monitoring learning over time do not provide sufficiently accurate information about the progress individual children make. Senior leaders recognise the importance of high-quality assessment information and have taken a few steps to support staff to develop their understanding of tracking and monitoring children's progress. However, these are not yet underpinned by sufficiently robust assessment information. As a result, information about children's learning, progress and achievement is mostly inaccurate and does not reliably inform staff when identifying children's next steps. As planned, senior leaders need to continue to strengthen assessment approaches through shared professional discussion. They need to ensure a clear focus on improving the quality and consistency of observations. They should ensure staff use accurate information about children's learning to track progress, identify emerging learning and evaluate the impact of support and interventions.

Wellbeing, inclusion and equality	weak
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 have established positive relationships with children and their families. Most provide nurturing care and are beginning to develop more consistent approaches to supporting children's wellbeing. To strengthen this further, staff need to continue to build their understanding of the national wellbeing indicators to better support children's social and emotional wellbeing. Staff should now develop more effective systems that enable children to express their views about their wellbeing. They need to support children to participate in decisions that affect them and help to develop a stronger sense of belonging.
- Staff are at the early stages of developing their understanding of children's rights within the nursery. A few opportunities are available for children to share their views and make simple choices, appropriate to their age and stage of development. Approaches to promoting children's rights are not yet established across practice. Children are encouraged to set the table for lunch and enjoy the responsibility of ensuring there are enough resources for all their friends. However, opportunities for children to take responsibility or contribute to decision making are limited and tend to be adult directed. As a result, children do not yet have sufficient opportunities to influence aspects of nursery life or develop leadership skills in a meaningful way. Staff need further support to build their understanding of rights based practice. They should ensure there are planned opportunities for children to participate, express their views, develop confidence, independence and self-esteem.
- Overall, children's attendance is very good. Senior leaders monitor attendance and support as required to encourage good attendance at nursery.

- Where appropriate, staff put in place support for children with additional support needs, including individual plans and some adaptations to learning experiences. These arrangements help children to access learning alongside their peers. Parents value the care and support provided. Building on this, staff now need to strengthen how they recognise children's emerging support needs. They should ensure that children who would benefit from additional support receive help at the earliest stage. The recently appointed EYSP has begun to develop clearer processes to ensure timely and appropriate support for children. However, this work is at an early stage and has not yet had time to impact effectively on children's outcomes. The local authority should support staff to develop the quality of targets and next steps within children's individual plans. They should ensure that all targets are specific, meaningful and closely linked to children's developmental stages and learning priorities. Children would benefit from clear, achievable targets reviewed regularly with parents and relevant professionals. Staff should ensure that targets support children to build consistently on what they already know and can do.
- Staff provide a few opportunities for children to learn about different family traditions, experiences and cultures within the nursery community. For example, a calendar of events is used to help children to develop awareness of some cultural celebrations and festivals. While this is beginning to support children's understanding of experiences beyond their familiar world, opportunities to explore diversity more meaningfully are not yet well developed. Staff encourage families to share information about home life through "All About Me" books and learner journals. However, this is not used consistently through the curriculum to reflect children's cultures, languages or family experiences in everyday practice. As a result, children's identities and home experiences are not yet fully or regularly reflected within the nursery. Staff require further support to develop more intentional and consistent approaches to celebrating diversity in ways that are meaningful for all children.

Safeguarding

- The setting submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff, 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 that need to be addressed as a matter for urgency.
- Following the inspection Aberdeenshire Council, working with the setting, have taken forward areas for improvement in safeguarding which required urgent action. HM Inspectors have reviewed information relating to these areas for improvement. HM Inspectors are satisfied with the response taken by Aberdeenshire Council and do not require any further information.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard ~~Education Scotland~~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.