

**HMIE**

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

Summarised inspection findings

The Strynd Nursery

Orkney Islands Council

12 May 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

The Strynd Nursery provides early learning and childcare for up to 30 children from aged two to those not yet attending school. The current roll is 16 children. The nursery is situated in the centre of Kirkwall and children attend from the town and surrounding areas. A minority of children will start school in August 2026 with the majority returning to nursery for a second or third year. Children can attend term-time between 8.30 am and 3.00 pm with a mix of full days, morning and afternoon sessions or extended morning or afternoon sessions. A few children attend five days each week. The setting is very flexible in accommodating parental wishes for individual patterns of attendance.

A manager, lead practitioner and a practitioner are permanent members of staff. They are supported by two practitioners and a support worker who are temporary to the nursery. There have been staffing challenges over the last year and as a result, the staff team has recently been established. Staff work a mix of full-time and part-time contracts. The manager has recently taken over responsibility as the manager of nearby Willow Tree Nursery which provides places for babies to children aged three years. Both The Strynd Nursery and Willow Tree Nursery will move premises in session 2026-27 to a new purpose-built premise in a different part of Kirkwall. The new setting will provide places for children from 0-5 years, throughout the year.

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. <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 staff team have recently reviewed and refreshed the vision, values and aims alongside the creation of a simple curriculum rationale. This details the importance of strong, nurturing relationships as underpinning their curriculum offer. Staff confidently articulate important aspects of curriculum design, including the importance and impact of outdoor learning. Moving forward, staff should keep the rationale under review as the design of the curriculum evolves. They should focus on capturing fully the unique context and what influences and guides how the curriculum is delivered. Staff should involve families in developing a curriculum which reflects the needs of their children within the local community. They should build on their use of national

guidance to inform curriculum design. This includes curriculum design principles, children's rights and the importance of children directing their learning. Their ongoing curriculum development should focus on complementing existing, highly responsive approaches to children's interests.

- Staff provide interesting opportunities for children to develop literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing skills through daily learning experiences and provocations. They now need to plan learning intentionally across all curricular areas. In doing so, staff should ensure effective continuity and progression in children's learning. This should enable children to build on their prior learning and make continuous progress.
- Staff work very closely with families to support children as they begin nursery and when they move to other settings and onto school. They place high importance on investing time in building very positive relationships with children and their wider family using bespoke arrangements. Staff liaise with other settings and local schools across the year. Working together in this way helps staff provide well-planned transition programmes to ensure children feel secure, settle well and continue to learn.
- Staff make use of opportunities within the local community to provide learning episodes for children, for example, accessing the library, shops and cathedral. They should seek to develop further carefully chosen and sustained partnerships to provide progression in learning and to enrich the curriculum. Within the local context, this could include multi-generational partnerships and increased opportunities for family learning.
- Children learn important skills for life and learning through their day-to-day activities, for example, resilience and independence. They learn life skills, including social interactions and healthy food choices, through routines such as snack and lunch. Children are at the early stages of developing digital skills as part of their nursery experiences. Staff should develop and embed opportunities for children to gain a range of skills, enabling exploration and connection with the world beyond their immediate experience. Children enjoy helping in aspects of routines and caring for others including preparing snack. The majority of children are capable of taking on increased responsibility. This should enable them to develop and consolidate a wider range of skills and knowledge through real-life experiences.

Learning, teaching and assessment	good
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	

- Children receive a personalised welcome into nursery. They are very well supported by staff who recognise their differing emotional and developmental needs. Staff have developed predictable routines and clear boundaries resulting in children feeling happy, safe and secure. Almost all children are confident, motivated, engaged and enthusiastic in their play and learning. Staff support children well to develop their independence and make choices about their learning. A few children benefit from, and receive, well-planned, timely and sensitive adult support to engage more fully in purposeful play across the day.
- Staff make effective use of conversation to find out about children's interests, ideas and prior knowledge. They should continue to build their skills in extending children's thinking through the consistent use of open-ended questions and commentary. There is an appropriate balance between time children spend choosing activities and time spent in adult-directed tasks. Staff organise engaging opportunities for children to learn together in small groups in response to their interests. Children respond well to these opportunities that often introduce them to new learning, for example, recently learning about garden birds and chickens.
- Staff provide a wide range of resources and provocations to support children's play and learning, including a stimulating range of natural and open-ended materials. Children enjoy accessing freely the extensive, well-planned outdoor area in all weathers. They benefit from the freedom to explore, be curious and to be active in the interesting and varied space available.
- Staff regularly discuss children's individual needs and interests which enables them to provide a range of learning experiences that are motivating and engaging. They gather examples of children's experiences in learning journey folders. These include detailed narratives and a few

photographs. Going forward, staff should consider how they record learning to enable children to reflect more readily on their learning and progress. They could, for example, increase the use of photographs to make information more accessible to children. Parents share children's learning and achievements from home and appreciate the information about children's progress shared in individual learning journey folders.

- Staff carefully plan responsively to take forward children's interests, ensuring they build on what children already know and can do. They should continue to develop approaches to include more intentional planning across curriculum areas. This should help children make progress in their identified next steps in learning. Staff use attractive learning walls to help plan children's learning, building on their ideas and interests. They should progress plans to make this approach more accessible to help children readily share and direct their learning.
- The manager holds useful, regular meetings with staff to discuss and review children's development and progress in detail. Together they monitor and track children's progress using well-developed processes. Staff use this information to plan learning targets for individual children which are shared with parents. They should continue to develop targets ensuring they are more specific and inform intentional planning across the curriculum.

Wellbeing, inclusion and equality	good
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 place high importance on supporting children’s wellbeing. Children experience a caring and homely environment with staff who are respectful and nurturing. Staff know and understand the individual needs of each child. They provide effective support to children to help them share, take turns and develop independence. Staff role model respectful attitudes towards each other and work together collaboratively. As a result, children are learning to interact positively with each other, show respect and develop empathy. Staff skilfully engage in worthwhile restorative conversations with children, helping them resolve conflict, if it arises.
- Staff support children to identify their feelings when they start nursery each day, finding out if they feel ready to play and learn with their friends. Staff regularly talk about the wellbeing indicators with children and use them well during activities to support children’s understanding of their emotions. For example, children understand how to keep safe when using the slide properly outdoors and eat healthily at snack and lunch times. Staff should now explore accessible and meaningful ways to introduce children’s rights to support children to develop an age-appropriate awareness of these.
- Staff carefully monitor children’s attendance at nursery. They work sensitively and very flexibly with families to ensure the benefits of early learning and childcare for each child are maximised.
- Staff offer each child effective support and encouragement, ensuring that everyone is included. This is underpinned by the shared vision of “a special place where we play, learn and grow together”. They have carefully created an environment where all children benefit from

established routines and shared expectations. Staff respond sensitively to children's individual developmental stages and preferred learning styles. This supports each child to access learning in a way that works for them. When required, staff make well-considered adaptations to routines and the environment to take account of the range of children's needs. Staff identify next steps in learning for all children that reflect their development needs. They should develop further these to ensure they are consistently specific enough to demonstrate and measure the progress children make. Staff should build on existing very positive relationships and involve children and parents more fully in identifying and reviewing next steps in learning.

- Staff use their experience and knowledge of child development to support the identification of individual learning needs. As a result, children who require additional help with their learning are readily identified. Staff use a clear, staged process to ensure all children receive the correct help they need to help them learn. When required, staff create individual support plans with detailed strategies and targets to progress children's learning. When required, staff work effectively with other professionals to seek more specialised support and guidance. Staff have undertaken a range of professional learning to deepen their own understanding and at to enable them to adapt their practice. This includes, for example, the use of visual supports to aid communication and strategies to support children's emotional regulation.
- Within an ethos of respect and inclusion, staff ensure all children and families are treated with kindness and fairness. They have an extensive and very respectful understanding of the socio-economic, cultural and linguistic context in which children live. Senior leaders are enthusiastic about developing their use of data to help identify and implement strategies to further improve progress of children.

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

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.