

Early learning and childcare (ELC) setting shared inspection report

Crombie School Nursery

Aberdeenshire Council

10 February 2026

In November 2025, a team of inspectors from HMIE and the Care Inspectorate visited Crombie School Nursery. During our visit, we talked to parents/carers and children and worked closely with the manager and staff.

Key inspection findings

- Staff prioritise wellbeing and positive relationships among children, staff and families resulting in happy, confident children who make very good progress in their learning. Increased opportunities to involve parents in their child's experiences may strengthen this further.
- Children learn about and use a wide variety of digital technology to support and extend learning. This effective approach is well embedded and developmentally appropriate.
- Staff demonstrated strong teamwork, effective deployment, and a clear commitment to ongoing professional learning. This led to children who received consistent, high-quality care and support for their learning and wellbeing.
- Children were well cared for by staff who knew them well. However, to ensure key details are not missed, improvements should be made to the recording of information in children's personal plans and chronologies.

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

Summary of inspection findings

Key contextual Information

Crombie School Nursery is part of Crombie Primary School and provides early learning and childcare (ELC) in the Westhill area, Aberdeenshire. The nursery is registered for 32 children at any one time. It caters for children aged three to those not yet attending school. There are currently 23 children on the roll. Almost all children attend between 9 am and 3 pm, during term time.

The early years senior practitioner (EYSP) has overall responsibility for the nursery. She is supported by one early years lead practitioner. Further staffing includes three full-time practitioners, one part-time practitioner, one student and one Modern Apprentice.

The building consists of one open plan playroom with direct access to an outdoor area. Children are served lunch within the playroom.

Leadership: Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

Children were cared for by skilled staff who were registered with a professional body. Their high aspirations for children created a compassionate and responsive culture, supporting children to thrive and flourish.

Staff were well supported by the manager and lead practitioner. Leadership prioritised staff health and wellbeing through regular meetings, an open-door policy, and recognition of achievements. This created a positive team culture with high morale, where staff felt valued and motivated to provide quality care for children. Staff were enthusiastic and committed to ongoing professional learning. All staff had completed or refreshed essential training in first aid, food hygiene, and infection control, ensuring children were kept safe and healthy.

Professional development opportunities for staff included training in STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) and outdoor learning. This led to more varied resources and activities that sparked children's curiosity and creativity. For example, children used construction blocks to design imaginative models and enjoyed active play in the woodland area. Staff had also begun creating STEM learning bags to strengthen home learning links.

Training in play schemas helped staff understand how children learn, enabling them to plan activities that build thinking and problem-solving skills. As a result, children had more engaging learning experiences, grew in confidence, and developed independence in a safe and stimulating environment.

Practice notes and guidance such as the Care Inspectorate campaign to keep children safe, SIMOA (Safe, Inspect, Monitor, Observe, Act) and the Health and Social Care Standards were embedded in practice and led to high-quality interactions that supported children's health, wellbeing, and care needs.

Staff confidently used the Quality Improvement Framework and challenge questions to evaluate and improve the service. Staff were clear about their roles and responsibilities which contributed to the smooth running of the nursery. Regular team meetings, supervision, and peer monitoring supported reflective practice and professional discussions. An open and honest culture allowed staff to share ideas and learn from mistakes, leading to continuous improvement.

Leadership was encouraged at all levels. Staff took ownership of areas such as developing play provocations and completing audits like medication checks. These approaches created a safe, stimulating environment where children experienced consistent, high-quality care and learning opportunities.

Children were cared for by a consistent staff team. Staff absences were minimal, and staff were flexible in helping out and covering when needed. This led to consistent care and promoted positive relationships with children and families.

Staff worked well as a team and communicated effectively throughout the day. They supported each other when needed. For example, staff adjusted roles during lunch, so children continued to receive help.

Staff also modelled good practice and supported students in the setting. Sharing skills and knowledge–built staff confidence and created a welcoming, positive atmosphere for children and families.

Children play and learn: Learning, teaching and assessment

Staff have created a welcoming environment and as a result all children enter the nursery enthusiastic and ready to learn. All staff prioritise very positive relationships among children, staff and families. They work very well as a team. As a result, children receive clear, consistent messages which support them to follow routines and develop very well their independence skills. All children have the opportunity to be the ‘responsible citizen’ where they lead tasks such as feeding the fish. Almost all children are highly motivated for extended periods of time as they negotiate and take turns during play with their friends. Children are fully involved in the life of the setting. Staff respond very well to their ideas and the choices they make about their learning.

The staff team consistently provide highly motivating play spaces that encourage creativity. They use responsive area planning to ensure that spaces are resourced very well to support developing interests. For example, staff add loose parts and small construction into the block area to extend a focus on engineering.

Staff make very effective use of the outdoor spaces available within the school grounds and local community. Children choose where they would like to play and enjoy the challenge of learning within these different environments. All children have the opportunity to explore their local environment through ‘Woods Wednesday’ and ‘Funky Feet Friday’. They engage in learning with residents from the local sheltered housing. This wide range of rich, real-life experiences support children very well to build confidence and have a key role in leading their learning.

All staff have a deep understanding of how children develop and learn. They know children very well as individuals and interact with sensitivity and genuine interest. Almost all staff consistently use quality questions, supportive commentary and modelling to challenge thinking and deepen learning. Parents are involved in their child’s learning through stay and play sessions, parent chats and the online learning journal. They are supported to learn with their child at home through home learning links. Staff should build on this to provide further opportunities for families to share in their child’s learning within the setting.

Staff have benefited from professional learning on the use of digital technologies. They have used their understanding very effectively to reflect on and develop their practice over time. All children now learn about and use a wide range of appropriate digital technology to enhance their learning. For example, they confidently use an application to animate their drawings with voiceovers.

All staff make regular observations of children and document these within online journals and through very detailed, interactive, online floorbooks. Children revisit

their learning during nursery and at home. Parents have ongoing access to the journal and can follow their child's progress. Staff could now consider how they might streamline the assessment information and evidence they record. This should focus on recording children's significant learning. Staff plan effectively to offer an appropriate balance of child-led and adult-initiated experiences. Staff ensure that planned experiences are relevant, motivating and address children's needs and ongoing interests. They involve children very well in this process. All staff lead on aspects of this planning.

All staff benefit from tracking meetings with senior leaders three times per year. They use the information gathered on children to form a holistic picture of their progress across the curriculum. They identify next steps to address any gaps in learning. As planned, staff should involve families in the development and review of next steps in learning.

Children are supported to achieve: Nurturing care and support

Children were cared for by kind, responsive staff who communicated warmly and respectfully. Staff spoke at children's level and modelled good listening and conversation skills, helping children feel valued and understood. They knew when to offer support and when to step back, allowing children space to play and explore independently. This promoted confidence, independence, and positive relationships. Day-to-day transitions were well managed by staff. Children were given advance notice and thinking time before changes, such as tidying up for lunch or going to the library. A visual timetable supported children who needed extra help or were interested in what was coming next. Group times were used effectively to support children going to lunch, reducing waiting times while ensuring they had time to wash their hands.

Children's dignity and privacy was respected when supported in their personal care. The location of the toilets made supervision challenging, so doorbells were introduced to help staff respond quickly. However, this increased the risk of cross-contamination. The manager agreed to complete a risk assessment to identify potential hazards.

The environment was thoughtfully planned with cosy blankets, soft furnishings, and dimmed lighting to create calm spaces for quiet play, rest, and relaxation. After lunch, some children enjoyed sharing stories with staff, promoting comfort and emotional security.

Children experienced positive snack and mealtimes. Children enjoyed helping peel and cut up fruit for snack promoting their independence and practical skills. Lunch was well organised and unhurried. Meals were appealing, and dietary needs were met with suitable alternatives. Packed lunches were attractively presented, and staff provided respectful support when needed, such as kneeling beside children to help cut food. Children were supervised to keep them safe, however towards the end of snack, a few children were left sitting without a member of staff at their table; however, an

adult was present and close by. We addressed this with the manager who agreed to ensure children are well supported at all times when eating.

Children's personal plans contained relevant information to support their individual needs. Parents and carers were central to this process, enabling staff to understand each child's needs, personality, and interests. For a few children, an additional support plan and a risk assessment were in place to help keep them safe. However, updates were not recorded clearly, which meant some plans were difficult to read and contained outdated information. This created a risk of missing important details and delivering inconsistent care. We asked the manager to review the format of children's personal plans, and action to improve them is in progress.

Staff were knowledgeable in safeguarding and child protection. However, on one occasion the service's policy for recording and reporting a concern was not followed. We addressed this immediately with the school, who confirmed support for the child and family was ongoing. The manager agreed to complete a robust audit of chronologies and ensure all actions taken in response to child protection concerns are fully recorded.

Strong relationships with families had a positive impact on children's experiences. Transition into nursery was supported through tailored settling-in visits. Children with English as an additional language were encouraged to share their culture, promoting an inclusive environment where everyone felt valued. Families were involved through activities such as Book bug sessions, newsletters, play-and-stay events, community walks, and woodland visits. However, parents and carers did not enter the playroom during drop-off and pick-up. To strengthen shared learning, the service should explore ways to encourage families into the playroom.

Children are supported to achieve: Children's progress

Almost all children are becoming increasingly independent as they lead their learning indoors and in the outside spaces. They are confident communicators and are keen to be involved in all aspects of their nursery. For example, they develop playroom areas and decide where they would like to go for their walks. Staff monitor children's attendance and ensure that any barriers to attending the setting are addressed. This results in children maximising their learning time within the setting.

Staff ensure a strong focus on wellbeing. This is a major strength of the nursery. All children share how they are feeling using emotions characters as they enter the setting in the morning. Almost all children are able to talk articulately about their emotions. As a result, all children are settled, calm and happy. They follow nursery routines very well and take pride in their nursery. Almost all children independently access resources and carefully tidy these away when they are finished playing. All children benefit from well-planned opportunities to exercise and be active in the school gym.

Most children use a range of materials indoors and outdoors to confidently mark make with increasing detail. They enjoy writing for a purpose, for example, producing signs for their nursery. Almost all children are developing their fine motor control through motivating games. All children take part enthusiastically in songs and rhymes and almost all children listen and interact with stories for sustained periods of time. Almost all children are animated when telling their own stories, for example, through use of the puppet theatre. A majority of children have a developing understanding of money and cost through visits to the local shop. Almost all children are beginning to understand simple data gathering and how this can be displayed. For example, they represent their favourite pizza toppings and shoe sizes in pie charts and simple bar graphs. They confidently use positional language when producing treasure maps and finding where they live using online maps and tools. A few children could be challenged further as they develop their literacy and numeracy skills in real-life contexts.

Children benefit from increasing opportunities to explore the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects through their play. Most children have an early understanding of floating and sinking following their 'design and construct' experiments. Staff have plans to further develop this work.

Staff effectively celebrate children's individual achievements through ongoing meaningful praise and the 'our proud moments' wall. Children are proud to be part of the nursery and the wider community. Families are encouraged to share achievements from home, and these are documented in the online journals. Staff are at the early stages of tracking children's achievements from home. This positive start should be continued to support staff to build on children's prior learning.

Staff tracking systems are robust and demonstrate children are making very good progress over time. Data collected highlights that almost all children are on track to meet their developmental milestones. Children in need of additional support are identified promptly and strategies are put in place to ensure any gaps in learning are addressed. A few children would benefit from enhanced planning to ensure they receive increased challenge through the experiences on offer. The nursery team know their families very well and take positive steps to ensure equity for all. For example, they ensure stories are available in a range of languages.

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.

Practice worth sharing more widely (HMIE)

Staff have developed their highly effective approach to digital technology over time. They support children effectively to learn with, and through, a wide range of technology. They use digital floorbooks and online journals very well to support the learning process. The digital floorbooks include a wide range of videos and photographs to support children to re-visit learning. Children confidently use digital devices to access learning and resources through matrix barcodes across the nursery. This supports their independence skills very well. Children take photographs of their learning and staff add these to the digital floorbooks and to the online journals. They are supported by staff to use online applications to bring their drawings to life, including, creating moving parts and child voice overs. Other technologies, for example, torches and programmable toys support learning across the curriculum. Children use the torches to make their own shadow puppets and then use these to tell their own stories. Staff support children very well to use online tools to develop their understanding of where they live, their local environment and the wider world.

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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