

**HMIE**

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

Summarised inspection findings

Sgoil-àraich an Taobh Siar

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

18 August 2026

HM Inspectors gathered evidence to enable us to evaluate the sgoil-àraich'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 sgoil-àraich is located within Sgoil an Taobh Siar on the Isle of Lewis. Gàidhlig – Gaelic is of linguistic significance in this area, with Gàidhlig being the first language of many children. The sgoil-àraich provides early learning and childcare through the medium of Gàidhlig as part of the local authority's 'Gàidhlig First' policy.

The sgoil-àraich is registered to provide early learning and childcare for up to 24 children at one time, from two years to those not yet attending school. Currently there are 21 children on the roll, with 16 children attending at any one time. Children access their funded entitlement to early learning and childcare through a choice of two models. They can attend a term time provision between 8.30 am and 3.30 pm, or three days per week all year between 8.30 am and 5.30 pm. Children new to the sgoil-àraich can join the sgoil-àraich throughout the year. The sgoil-àraich consists of an indoor room with direct access to an outdoor garden space. Children use the sgoil outdoor playing areas.

The headteacher of the sgoil has overall responsibility for the sgoil-àraich. She is supported by a sgoil-àraich manager for two and a half days a week. Staffing comprises a full-time play leader and a nursery key worker, with two vacant posts. On occasion, vacancies have impacted on children's entitlement to sgoil-àraich provision. Almost all staff in the sgoil-àraich are fluent speakers of Gàidhlig. An executive headteacher supports Sgoil An Taobh Siar as part of the strategic structure of the local authority.

Curriculum	good
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 curriculum is firmly based on play and, for almost all of the time, total immersion. It is underpinned by respectful, nurturing relationships that promotes very effectively children's learning of Gàidhlig. Staff take forward well Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Gàidhlig first policy, so all children learn through Gàidhlig in the sgoil-àraich. Staff have a strong understanding of the importance of using Gàidhlig consistently in a range of learning situations. Too often,

children's learning through Gàidhlig is interrupted by staff vacancies. Staff use well national practice guidance, including the 'Advice on Gaelic Education' to enhance effectively the curriculum. Staff have collaborated with colleagues at the primary stages to produce a pictorial version of the curriculum rationale. This describes clearly how the curriculum takes account of their unique context and sgoil-àraich values. Staff should explicitly ensure that the sgoil-àraich's aims reflect strategic priorities, such as raising attainment and promoting Gàidhlig. For this, staff should use His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education report, 'Evaluating the Quality of Gàidhlig Education' (2026).

- The curriculum covers entitlements to learning appropriately. Staff plan the curriculum flexibly to be highly responsive to children's interests. This approach enables staff to provide enjoyable and relevant learning experiences. Staff keep an overview of how well all curriculum experiences and outcomes are covered in children's learning. Staff are beginning to use newly produced curriculum learning pathways. They should continue to use these pathways to plan progress more thoroughly for each individual and small groups of children. To do this, staff should use intentional playroom planning to ensure more depth and challenge in learning across all curricular areas. Children who are from homes where Gàidhlig is spoken should be challenged further in their learning.
- Staff understand the community context well. They take effective account of the social and cultural backgrounds of families. Staff's curriculum planning begins appropriately with what children know and can do. This helps to support continuity and progression in most children's learning. Staff provide interesting opportunities for parental engagement and family learning through regular stay and play sessions and invites to assemblies. Staff should continue asking parents to contribute to the curriculum to share their skills, knowledge and talents with the children.
- Children and families experience very well-planned transitions into the nursery and onwards into P1. Staff consult effectively with parents to increase their understanding of children's needs and preferences as they come to the sgoil-àraich for the first time. Staff offer parents stay and play sessions as children become accustomed to the sgoil-àraich. Teachers in P1 have an effective year-long programme where they deliver part of children's total immersion play. Children at the sgoil-àraich routinely join their older friends at the bun-sgoil stage for assemblies and to play at interval. Sgoil-àraich staff meet with teachers of P1 to share relevant information at children's transition. Staff should ensure continuity in strategies to support learning and interactions through play, the Gàidhlig Medium way, across the early level.
- Staff make very productive use of the local community to provide enhanced learning experiences for children. Children walk to the immediate area adjacent to the sgoil-àraich to play in a larger area, have parties in the community hall and get products in local shop. They protect the local environment by picking up litter. Staff should continue planning children's learning in the outdoors, while being clear on key themes with which children engage, such as learning for sustainability.
- Children develop important skills for life and communication in Gàidhlig. Older children are confident in their understanding of Gàidhlig. A few children sustain conversations fluently over a range of areas. A few children converse in Gàidhlig at home or with grandparents and neighbours, which supports learning at home. Younger children understand the language associated with personal situations, familiar play contexts and routines. Younger children are

beginning to say a few phrases of Gàidhlig. Staff should encourage children to talk more Gàidhlig in everyday situations, such as during their time together for snack. Children develop very well their skills in numeracy and mathematics. They are developing their knowledge of skills for work by discussing career opportunities available locally. Children develop important practical life skills in growing, preparing and purchasing food. They should increase their use of digital technology to address gaps in their learning. Children should analyse more how well they develop their skills in learning, life and work.

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 embed strong, positive relationships with children and their families. They know children very well and are highly attuned to their individual emotional and developmental needs. Children are supported to feel happy, relaxed and confident. They contribute well to the daily life and culture of the sgoil-àraich. Children work well together and develop a strong sense of belonging to the sgoil-àraich.
- Children learn productively, both indoors and outdoors. They choose when to go outdoors to explore, investigate and exercise. All children are settled and successful in their total immersion environment. Children engage well in a wide range of motivating learning experiences using an exciting range of play spaces. Almost all children concentrate well for extended periods of time, both in adult-initiated activities and activities they choose. They demonstrate imagination, independence and confidence as they explore and interact with their surroundings. Staff should review further the balance between adult-led and child-initiated learning experiences to ensure enough is decided by adults. At times, children would benefit from more consistent and regular interactions through Gàidhlig, and more small group activities personalised to their learning needs. Staff should increase the use of singing and rhymes for deepening children's fluency outwith group time. This would enrich further a few individual and small group play activities, for which having planned language targets would be important. Staff should ensure further challenge for children who make faster progress in Gàidhlig language, both as they choose what to play and in group sessions. This should enhance further pace of learning and total immersion.
- Staff support children very effectively in listening to and absorbing the Gàidhlig language through immersion. They set sound foundations for the next phase of total immersion, where

children as they become more fluent, talk in the language. Staff use 'Gailearaidh Gàidhlig'- Gaelic Gallery and 'Frèam Cànan', a language framework, to check how well children are developing their fluency in acquiring the language. This is a positive start to checking progress in listening, understanding and talking Gàidhlig. Staff should extend this further to record ongoing and current progress in listening and talking.

- Staff value children's suggestions as they plan a range of indoor and outdoor opportunities to develop children's Gàidhlig language skills, knowledge and understanding. Children experience a range of play spaces, which have new provocations from day to day. Staff are beginning to develop a play space that promotes talking in Gaelic. Children are at the early stages of using this play space to explore how radio programmes are made, while promoting careers through Gàidhlig. Staff should continue to develop a range of play spaces that promote authentic use of Gàidhlig, and the total immersion and cultural benefits of Gàidhlig. Staff plan promotes children's rights using the United Nations Rights of the Child. Rights are yet to be a strong feature of children's learning.
- Staff's observations are beginning to capture children's learning in a few curricular areas and aspects of Gàidhlig fluency. They use a few national Benchmarks to track children's progress in literacy, numeracy and mathematics, health and wellbeing and a few curricular areas. Staff maintain a digital learning platform for each child's progress. Children keep a collation of their best pieces of work to share with their families. Staff would now benefit from identifying more clearly the significant learning to be observed and have thorough evidence of this learning.
- Staff use a range of trackers to glean an overview of children's progress overtime in a few areas of learning. They are beginning to check children's progress using a local authority tracker. Staff should now assess, analyse and record more deeply children's understanding of Gàidhlig language. They should aim for a more accurate and relevant overview of children's progress through immersion. The headteacher and nursery should assist staff use information from assessment to plan challenging, broad and meaningful early total immersion education for individuals and groups of learners. Staff should continue to link with other sgoiltean-àraich to discuss highly effective practice and to moderate standards in Gàidhlig.

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 create a warm and welcoming learning environment, where children are respected and valued. They show a clear commitment to encouraging children’s wellbeing and inclusion. They place strong importance on building positive relationships that help children feel safe, secure and confident in sgoil-àraich. Children engage well with one another, demonstrating kindness as they play together and build positive friendships. Staff support children to recognise different feelings and emotions that they may experience. They provide effective sensitive support when children need help to express how they feel. Staff should now build on this by supporting all children to explore and talk about their feelings more regularly through everyday routines and real-life experiences. For this, they should develop children’s understanding of their wellbeing by exploring the wellbeing indicators in meaningful ways. They can strengthen this further by making clearer links to children’s rights, supporting children to meaningfully understand that their thoughts, feelings and voices matter.
- Overall, children’s attendance is good. Senior leaders monitor attendance and take a few steps to encourage children and their families to access their sgoil-àraich entitlement. Staff should continue encouraging parents for their children to attend the sgoil-àraich to maximise their learning of Gàidhlig.
- Children benefit from calm and sociable snack and mealtimes. Staff sit alongside children and help create a relaxed atmosphere where conversations naturally take place. They support children to develop confidence in expressing themselves, as they learn new vocabulary and communication skills as they enjoy their food together. Staff should build on this by creating more opportunities for children to take an active role during snack and mealtime routines.

Staff should ensure children are not waiting for extended periods by organising snack and lunch routines more effectively. They need to ensure interactions remain purposeful and responsive. This should support a more responsive approach to meeting children's needs and preferences during mealtimes.

- Staff recognise the importance of knowing children well to support their wellbeing and help them access all areas of their learning. Senior leaders should continue to develop the keyworker role to ensure all children receive this support consistently. This role has been interrupted from staffing challenges. They should build on the positive relationships already in place.
- Staff work well with parents and other professionals to support children who may need extra help with their learning and development. They create plans that outline how they will support each child and help them progress in their learning and development. When required, staff make use of the expertise of a range of professional partners to ensure children's needs are well supported and met. Staff use a range of approaches, including support for communication and language, to help meet most children's individual needs. Staff should now make sure these plans are consistently clear and focused. Plans should identify targets that show clearly the steps children are working towards. Staff should check and review plans regularly with parents to identify the progress children are making and what is helping them most. Overall, staff understand their responsibilities to keep children safe and ensure the care and wellbeing needs of all children are met well.
- Children benefit from opportunities to learn about their local community, including visits from the "Gàidhlig bus". These experiences help children explore local culture and language in an engaging way. Staff value diversity and understand the socio-economic, cultural and linguistic context in which children and families live. They should now build on this by extending children's experiences of a wider range of cultures, celebrations and communities beyond their immediate experience. Staff should support children to understand and appreciate different cultures in the wider world.

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.