

Summarised inspection findings

Sgoil-àraich Ullapuil – Ullapool Gàidhlig Medium Education

The Highland 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

Context

Sgoil-àraich Ullapuil – Ullapool Gàidhlig Medium Education (GM) at Ullapool Primary School – provides Gàidhlig Medium Education. The sgoil-àraich is registered for 35 children to attend at any one time. It caters for children aged two to those not yet attending school. There are currently 30 children on the roll.

Children access their entitlement to funded early learning and childcare (ELC) by attending from 8.50 am until 3.20 pm Monday to Thursday and 8.50 am and 12.50 pm on a Friday. The majority of children also attend a nearby outdoor nursery as part of their entitlement to 1140 hours of early learning and childcare.

A nursery class through the medium of English shares the same accommodation with the sgoil-àraich. They have separate playrooms but share, for example, a reception area, kitchen, office and sensory room. The sgoil-àraich is registered separately with the Care Inspectorate from the English Medium nursery. Both nurseries are part of Bun-sgoil Ullapuil – Ullapool Primary School – and are managed by the headteacher. The headteacher is the only promoted post holder across the bun-sgoil and sgoil-àraich. Staff provide day-to-day leadership of the sgoil-àraich.

The headteacher was newly appointed to the bun-sgoil in January 2026. Prior to this, there were a number of short-term appointments for the post of headteacher from June 2022. From August 2026, the headteacher will have a 0.5 full-time teaching commitment in English Medium Education at the primary stages. The sgoil-àraich has two full-time early years practitioners (EYP), a part-time EYP who is also a part-time support worker, and a full-time support worker. The sgoil-àraich has challenges recruiting staff and covering for absences. A few staff members are learning Gàidhlig.

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 sgoil-àraich curriculum rationale places appropriate emphasis on children's wellbeing, play and immersion. It is informed by Curriculum for Excellence and reflects key local contextual features. This includes the rural and coastal environment in which children live. Staff make effective use of immersion, routines and singing as part of the curriculum. This enables children to hear and use Gàidhlig in meaningful ways as they begin to acquire the language. The sgoil-àraich has the same vision, values and aims as the bun-sgoil. The headteacher and staff should ensure that the vision, values and aims articulate more clearly how total immersion will be delivered consistently and how attainment will be raised. Senior leaders should include in the sgoil-àraich aims how children accrue the cognitive, linguistic and cultural benefits of bilingualism.
- Staff use a range of guidance to design the curriculum. They deliver most curriculum areas, including literacy and Gàidhlig, numeracy and mathematics, health and wellbeing, expressive arts and science. Staff should ensure full coverage of the breadth of the curriculum. Children are curious to explore further and be challenged in their development and progression in the curriculum. Staff should make increased use of Gàidhlig-specific resources, such as the Advice on Gaelic Education, for planning. They should ensure children's learning through play is consistently through total immersion to increase further children's fluency.
- Staff plan the curriculum to be responsive to children's interests and take account of events and themes, such as Halloween. This approach enables children to benefit from a range of relevant learning experiences. Staff should develop a clear overview of the experiences and outcomes that they use in planning the curriculum. This would support staff better to identify and address any gaps in children's learning across the curriculum. Staff should use this information with observations of children's learning through play to increase intentional playroom planning.
- Staff support children's transition into the setting with a helpful 'All About Me' document. They gather information to ensure an individualised approach for each child. Staff plan a few purposeful transition activities between the sgoil-àraich and the bun-sgoil. These are designed to help children be confident about moving to the primary stages. A local Comann nam Pàrant has recently been reinstated in Bun-sgoil agus Sgoil-àraich Ullapuil. Staff should work together with Comann nam Pàrant to develop a longer-term strategy to promote and support Gàidhlig. Parents are keen to collaborate on finding solutions for current staffing challenges.
- Staff provide a few opportunities for children to interact with fluent speakers of Gàidhlig through intergenerational storytelling and singing. Children visit the library to hear and use Gàidhlig in songs and through texts. These opportunities help children experience an increased sense of purpose to being immersed in Gàidhlig. Children increase their knowledge of their local community through an interesting range of visits to places and from partners. Staff should extend further the partners with which children connect to hear and use Gàidhlig. They should refresh their knowledge of partners who can support children's learning of the language and culture in the local area, including through digital technology. Staff have very positive and attentive relationships with parents. They make useful resources available to parents to support children's learning at home. This includes staff's very valuable sharing of sound files of phrases that parents can use with their children.
- Children develop important skills for life and communication in Gàidhlig. They understand language associated with personal situations and play contexts, as well as routines. Children

are starting to speak Gàidhlig, such as greeting their friends at the sgoil-àraich. Staff should plan more ambitious targets for developing children's skills in listening, talking and reading in all of their planning for the curriculum. Children help prepare foods and bake for snack. They grow plants and vegetables in the nursery garden. This learning has been extended to visits to local cafes where children learn how food and hospitality are popular career opportunities in their local area. Staff should continue to develop children's skills in important areas such as digital technology.

Learning, teaching and assessment	satisfactory
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 in the sgoil-àraich benefit from caring and supportive environments, which are immersive for the majority of time. They are happy and confident. Most children engage well in a range of motivating play, both indoors and outdoors. Children explore and experiment while acquiring Gàidhlig language. Staff provide valuable opportunities throughout the sgoil-àraich for children to engage with literacy through talk, read a range of books and mark make. Children should have more stimulus for independent talk in Gàidhlig, including developing their imagination as part of role play. Children's play and learning experiences must be in total immersion.
- Staff model the use of quality Gàidhlig in regular language routines. Children practise songs and conversations to exchange greetings, feelings, and details of days of the week and weather. This is progressing children's fluency in Gàidhlig language and building their confidence in talking Gàidhlig. Staff should interact more in Gàidhlig with children as they choose what to play. At these times, staff should increase their use of commentaries in Gàidhlig. This would enrich all 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 reflect children's interests as they plan children's learning through play. They value children's suggestions as they plan a range of indoor and outdoor opportunities to develop their Gàidhlig language skills, knowledge and understanding. These experiences support early language acquisition and engagement. Staff should develop further a wider range of play contexts that explicitly promote Gàidhlig. This would enable children to experience the linguistic, social and economic value of being Gàidhlig speakers. For example, planned contexts

such as a cèilidh space, a Gàidhlig community hub or a sgoil Ghàidhlig would help children apply language skills in meaningful and culturally authentic ways. Children's outdoor play is currently limited due to restricted access to the full outdoor area for safety reasons. The local authority should prioritise making the full outdoor space safely accessible.

- Staff's observations begin 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, and health and wellbeing. Staff maintain learning journey folders for each child. Staff are at an early stage of checking children's progress using developmental milestones. Staff should now assess, analyse and record children's understanding of Gàidhlig language. This would give staff a more accurate and relevant overview of children's progress through immersion. The headteacher now needs to start having regular conversations with staff on children's progress and what intentional planning increases fluency and progress. This should ensure children continue to access a broad, balanced and meaningful early total immersion education through Gàidhlig. Staff are keen to link with other sgoiltean-àraich to discuss highly effective practice and to moderate standards in Gàidhlig.

Wellbeing, inclusion and equality	satisfactory
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	

- The sgoil-àraich provides an inclusive and nurturing environment where every child is valued and treated with dignity and respect. Staff promote well the importance of children's learning of Gàidhlig being underpinned by positive relationships. This helps children feel confident and secure in learning a new language through immersion. Children settle quickly into the playroom, accessing their favourite toys and playing with their friends. Staff maintain good communication with parents to let them know how well their children are settling into the sgoil-àraich. Children know how adults support them if they feel upset or angry.
- Staff are familiar with the wellbeing indicators and use them in their planning of learning. They should continue developing children's understanding of the wellbeing indicators in age-appropriate ways. Children talk about how to be safe, healthy and responsible when playing indoors and outdoors. They are encouraged by staff to risk assess their activities as they play together. Children's understanding of how to keep safe is supported well by visits from the police and fire services. They understand the importance of making healthy choices at snack time. All children benefit from unhurried, calm snack experiences. They develop their social skills well during snack as they hear Gàidhlig being spoken, and as they talk with staff and other children. Staff should develop further children's independence and leadership skills. Children should be given more responsibilities within the sgoil-àraich.
- Senior leaders have developed clear procedures to encourage children's regular attendance at the sgoil-àraich. Children learn about the concept of recording their attendance when they register that they are going to play outside. Parents receive well-judged communication on how regular attendance supports children's fluency and progress in Gàidhlig, and achievement across the curriculum. Senior leaders should continue to engage with families to encourage

them to maximise children's attendance at the sgoil-àraich to benefit from total immersion in Gàidhlig.

- Staff provide all children with appropriate support and encouragement to ensure everyone is included. They use spaces well to ensure most children participate and engage fully in their play and learning. Staff understand and identify when children need additional support to help them play and learn. When required, staff seek advice from other professionals to help them offer the right support at the right time. Staff work together with parents and other professionals to develop plans to meet the specific care and learning needs of individual children. They now need to make more effective use of these plans to identify better specific targets. Staff should provide timely support that progresses children's learning and improves their progress.
- Senior leaders and staff have created an inclusive ethos, which ensures that all children and their families are treated fairly, equally and with respect. Children and their families are known very well by staff. Children are beginning to learn about diversity through celebrating festivals. Staff should continue to develop a clear strategy for developing children's understanding of diversity and equality. Children should learn about diversity and equality through the perspective of Gàidhlig and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Staff met well duties to increase the number of children learning through Gàidhlig. The local authority should ensure the availability of appropriately fluent Gàidhlig-speaking staff to meet statutory obligations under the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education (2017). Children need to be totally immersed in Gàidhlig to raise attainment.

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.