

Summarised inspection findings

Stornoway Childcare Centre

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

15 July 2025

Key contextual information

Stornoway Childcare Centre is a Gaelic (Learners) setting that provides early learning and childcare (ELC) for children under the age of three. Currently, most children are aged two-three years of age. The centre is situated in the grounds of Bun-sgoil Steòrnabhaigh - Stornoway Primary School on the Isle of Lewis. Sgoil-àraich Steòrnabhaigh - Stornoway Primary Nursery is situated within the same building as the centre.

Stornoway Childcare Centre opens all year, and children can access places between 8.30 am and 5.30 pm. Children have varying attendance patterns. The centre is registered for 40 children at any one time. The current roll is 52. Places are provided for children under three who are eligible for 1140 hours of funded ELC. Currently, most places are self-funded by parents.

The staff team consists of a manager, two playleaders who have lead responsibilities and 11 key workers.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

good

This indicator focuses on ensuring high quality learning experience for young children. It highlights the importance of a very good understanding of child development and early learning pedagogy. Effective use is made of observation to inform future learning and identify the progress made. Children are involved in planning for their own learning. Together these ensure children's successes and achievements are maximised. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of interactions
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- The manager and practitioners welcome children, families and visitors warmly into the centre. Children benefit from the positive and respectful ethos. Almost all children settle well and explore their playroom and outdoors confidently. Most children sustain interest for extended periods of time when investigating sensory and natural materials. They mix, combine and transport materials to support their investigations.
- The range of experiences both indoors and outdoors support children very well to develop their physical, communication, early language and numeracy skills appropriate to their stage of development. This includes building their vocabulary in both English and Gaelic through relevant play experiences and routines. Practitioners give children time and space to develop and extend their imaginative play. For example, when making pretend soup within the mud kitchen and playdough ice cream within the house corner. Children enjoy visits to the polytunnel. They plant seeds and watch the fruit and vegetables grow. They take care of them by watering, digging out weeds and picking ripe strawberries for snack.
- The centre's manager and staff promote and use Gaelic through play. They have developed a Gaelic learner pathway (Crùinn Còmhla le Ionad Cùram-chloinne Steòrnabhaigh). Practitioners are very positive role models and support children's acquisition of language in both English and Gaelic very well. Overall, practitioners demonstrate their depth of knowledge on child development through their skilled interactions with children. They play alongside children, adjusting their use of language according to children's stage of development in English and Gaelic. Practitioners comment, explain and ask relevant questions when appropriate, to support and extend children's play. The manager and practitioners use digital technology

successfully to enable children and families to hear and practise Gaelic. This includes the use of talking buttons, the Gaelic songbook, quick response codes and tablet computers.

- In the last year, the quality of practitioners' observations of children at play and the skills they are developing has improved significantly. Practitioners have a clearer focus on children's individual stages of development and their emerging skills. These are recorded on an online platform, which parents access from home. Practitioners provide parents with helpful guidance on experiences that will support children's learning at home. For example, using the centre's Gaelic songbook and making playdough. As recognised, practitioners should identify clear next steps to support planning for children's learning within the centre. This should help them plan for interactions, experiences and spaces more effectively.
- The current planning process is being reviewed and amended. Senior leaders have worked well together, to ensure the new approach to planning has a sharper focus on children's development and learning. As part of this process, they should work towards a better balance of responsive and intentional planning. Moving forward, practitioners should implement Curriculum for Excellence for children who are aged three. Practitioners support children who require additional support with their learning very well. Children have clear individual plans in place that outline key strengths and areas where targeted support would be beneficial. Practitioners create and review these plans regularly, in partnership with parents and partners.
- Pastoral transitions into, across the centre and onto Sgoil-àraich Steòrnabhaigh - Stornoway Primary Nursery are strong. Practitioners plan transitions carefully, to ensure both parents and children are supported sensitively. Time is taken to ensure children are comfortable within their new setting. Collaborative working within the centre and with staff from the primary nursery, result in smooth transitions for almost all children.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

- 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.

3.2 Securing children's progress

very good

This indicator relates to the development and learning of babies, toddlers and young children. It requires clear understanding of early learning and development and pedagogy. It reflects the integrated way young children learn and the importance of experiences and development happening on an individual basis within a supportive, nurturing and stimulating environment. High quality early learning and childcare contributes significantly to enhancing children's progress and achievement as they grow and learn. It can benefit all children by closing the attainment gap and ensuring equity for all. It is about the holistic nature of development and learning ensuring these foundations are secure in order to achieve future attainment success. The themes are:

- progress in communication, early language, mathematics, and health and wellbeing
- children's progress over time
- overall quality of children's achievement
- ensuring equity for all children

- Overall, children make very good progress in their learning and development. This is a direct result of skilled interactions of staff and rich nursery experiences that support the varying developmental stages of children, including early bilingualism.
- In communication, early language and literacy, children make very good progress relevant to their stage of development. They make their needs known by using gestures, signing or using their words. They follow simple instructions. All children enjoy singing which takes place in small groups as well as spontaneously. They look at books independently and enjoy hearing stories. Children's early mark making skills develop very well through sensory experiences, gradually progressing to using a range of media. A few children use the correct grip to control a pencil and make lines and circular marks on paper.
- Children are progressing very well in their understanding and use of Gaelic. All children are exposed to Gaelic language throughout their day as they play. As a result, their vocabulary is extending very well. They name familiar animals, objects and say simple phrases. Children follow simple instructions given in Gaelic. All children join in enthusiastically with action songs and rhymes included in the Gaelic songbook.
- Children are making very good progress in early mathematics. They develop an early awareness of volume and capacity when filling and emptying containers and playing with sand and water. A few older children use the language of full and empty. Children count to five, with a few rote counting beyond 10. They are beginning to count objects one for one. A few older children count confidently in Gaelic. Children explore shape and size during different play contexts and can identify big and small items. A few children sort items into groups. For example, zoo and farm animals. They develop problem solving skills as they use stacking toys and jigsaw puzzles.
- Children are making very good progress in health and wellbeing. Increasingly, they are becoming independent during play and routines. Children are developing the skills to help them share and take turns. They demonstrate physical skills very well and enjoy being outdoors in all weathers. This includes learning to pull themselves up using furniture, climbing stairs, running and using balance bikes confidently. Older children are confident when balancing and coordinating their movements when using open-ended resources.

- Practitioners celebrate children's achievements in a meaningful way. They display photographs and children's artwork and creations around the playrooms for children and families to see. Practitioners share children's individual achievements with parents through an online platform. Parents welcome the opportunity to see these 'wow moments' on a regular basis. Children are proud when practitioners praise them for using Gaelic successfully in the correct context.
- All children have made very good progress since starting nursery, relevant to their stage of development. Learning journals, support plans and trackers demonstrate that children continue to make progress over time.
- The manager and practitioners have created a highly inclusive centre and recognise the importance of equity for all. They know children and families very well. Practitioners value children as individuals with their own needs and personalities. They give children the right level of support to make sure they access all experiences and make the best possible progress. This includes targeted support as required. The manager and practitioners collaborate with other professionals and community learning and development. This includes support for learning Gaelic. Together, they provide very effective support to secure positive outcomes for children, families and practitioners.

Practice worth sharing more widely

Gaelic (Learners) Pathway

This centre provides early learning and childcare for Gaelic (Learners). The centre's manager and practitioners have developed a Gaelic (Learner) pathway with the support of local authority officers, community learning and development and a parent. Practitioners and children learn Gaelic alongside each other through play, by singing songs, rhymes, using short phrases and naming familiar animals and objects. Practitioners access additional professional learning to support their learning of Gaelic further.

Practitioners' and children's understanding and use of Gaelic is impacted very positively by this pathway. Their confidence is growing, leading to improved outcomes for all. Practitioners recognised that Gaelic was very much part of children's identity and that acquiring the language should be an intentional part of children's learning. Children are clearly enthusiastic and motivated by their learning of Gaelic. The centre encourages family engagement with Gaelic by making the songs children sing, available in a book and as a sound file for use in the home. The manager and practitioners are promoting Gaelic very effectively as required by the Gaelic legislation.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland 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.