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

Summarised inspection findings

Carleith Primary Nursery Class

West Dunbartonshire Council

26 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

Carleith Primary School Early Learning and Childcare Centre (ELCC) is located in the grounds of Carleith Primary School in the area of Duntocher, West Dunbartonshire. The ELCC is registered for 78 children at any one time, aged from three years to those not yet attending school. There are currently 19 children on the roll attending between the hours of 8.45 am and 2.45 pm. The ELCC is a term-time provision. The headteacher has overall responsibility for the nursery. He is supported by one early years principal teacher (PT) and one lead practitioner. Further staffing includes four full-time early learning and childcare officers, two part-time learning assistants and one part-time early years assistant. The nursery consists of two playrooms with direct access to an outdoor space. The children 'free flow' between these areas. The school dining hall is used for lunches.

Curriculum	**very 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. Curriculum 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 principles of curriculum design 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

- Children experience a motivating and dynamic curriculum. This is strongly underpinned by the setting's core aims, 'learning powers', children's rights and the importance placed on the wellbeing of all. Staff value the 'learning powers' that help to shape children's experiences. For example, 'Tio Teamwork' and 'Kenny Kindness' support children to work well together and show kindness to each other. Staff model these consistently as they interact with each other and with children and families. As a result, the 'learning powers' are firmly embedded in practice.

- Highly skilled staff ensure children have a wide range of opportunities to learn in relevant contexts. This reflects the staff team's deep understanding of pedagogy and early childhood development. The leadership team are passionate about continuous improvement and support staff consistently well. As a result, staff are highly motivated. All staff lead on aspects of the curriculum and are supported to attend high quality, relevant professional learning opportunities. As a result, children experience a broad and balanced curriculum that is exciting, challenging and fun. Staff should now consider how they could ensure further challenge for the

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few children who would benefit from this. For example, they should consider a more flexible approach to setting targets for individual children across the full curriculum.

- The headteacher and staff have a very clear understanding of their rationale for curriculum design. They are committed to continuously improving their curriculum supported by a strategic five-year plan. This long-term planning encompasses very well their local context and a clear understanding of the needs of their children and families. Staff provide a wide range of experiences across the curriculum which support children effectively to develop their creativity skills and confidence. Almost all children actively lead their own learning. Staff support children to shape the spaces and experiences on offer to them. Almost all children readily share their ideas and opinions knowing that these will be valued and acted upon by staff.

- Staff provide a range of digital technologies to support aspects of the curriculum. For example, children use the internet for research and explore programmable toys to support learning about direction. More recently, staff training on 'film and screen' has led to children experimenting with creating live feeds. Staff should move forward with their exciting plans to introduce an 'animation station' within the setting, leading to further challenge for those children who are ready for this.

- Staff provide regular opportunities for families to share in their child's learning. For example, families benefit from stay and play sessions, parent meetings and family learning sessions. Staff value the contributions families make and work with them to support development of the curriculum, for example, they have organised a survey on forest experiences. Staff make effective use of a range of partnerships to support delivery of the curriculum. As a result, children are developing a sense of citizenship and an understanding of their contribution within their wider community. For example, they have recently been learning about acts of kindness and deliver thoughtful home-made gifts to their partners and neighbours. Staff have worked with the local care home to develop fun, intergenerational experiences that meet the needs of the residents and children.

- All children benefit from a wide range of opportunities to develop skills for life and learning. They are motivated by the experiences on offer and play well with their friends, demonstrating kindness and respect. They take care of their setting and are clearly proud to be part of the Carleith team.

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Learning, teaching and assessment	very 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

- Staff demonstrate a strong commitment to fostering positive, highly responsive relationships with children and families. All children settle quickly as a result of all staff being consistently vigilant and attuned to their needs. Staff are very responsive to the needs of children who may require extra support to settle as they transition from home to nursery. This sensitive approach ensures all children feel safe and ready to play.

- Staff have created an inspiring, high-quality environment which is welcoming, calm and nurturing. Staff and children have recently made changes to the indoor environment based on children's feedback. As a result, children use the indoor spaces more independently and lead their own learning. All children are inspired by the motivating provocations provided. They use the wide range of open-ended resources very well, displaying imagination and creativity. Almost all children are enthusiastic to share their ideas. They demonstrate high levels of engagement during free play. Staff provide a motivating range of play experiences in the outdoor area. Children learn about their natural environment and participate in science experiments enthusiastically. Staff make very good use of the spaces available. For example, they recently supported children's interest in the Winter Olympics, where children used resources to toboggan down the grass hill. Children participate in regular, planned opportunities within the local community. For example, they use money to purchase items at the shop and visit residents of the local care home. These experiences support children very well to develop a range of skills in real life contexts.

- Staff consistently model the language of the 'learning powers' which children identify readily in their play. Children are independent, curious and reflective thinkers. Staff regularly share and celebrate children's successes with families using an appropriate, well-considered approach involving stickers and certificates. Staff observe play confidently and are skilful in the timing of

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their interactions. All staff interactions with children are nurturing and encouraging and almost all staff extend learning, promote problem solving and encourage reflection very well.

- Senior leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to provide high-quality, appropriate professional learning opportunities for all staff. They support staff well to use evidence-based approaches to support children's learning. As a result, staff respond to individual needs confidently using a targeted, well-considered approach. This has a positive impact on children's engagement in learning and the progress they make.

- Staff, supported by senior leaders, have a clear approach to planning for children's learning. They use regular, helpful daily catch-up sessions and team meetings to share what they know about children's learning and development. Staff work together effectively to plan high quality experiences for children. They have developed a comprehensive planning system which ensures an appropriate balance of child-led, adult-initiated and adult-directed learning. Staff are highly responsive to children's interests and record these within an online platform, within photographic floorbooks and within children's 'Being Me' books. Children are involved in this process meaningfully and are encouraged to contribute. They have ownership of their 'Being Me' books and regularly re-visit their learning through these. Staff record high-quality observations of learning using these books and consider possible lines of development for each child.

- Senior leaders meet staff termly to review children's progress in their learning and development. They consider the holistic assessment information they have gathered carefully to monitor and track children's progress. Staff use this information meaningfully to plan learning targets for individual children which they share with parents. As planned, staff should now develop their approach to further involve families in the development of these targets for children.

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Wellbeing, inclusion and equality	very 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 the wellbeing of all. They foster strong relationships with children and families. This is reflected in the nurturing, joyful ethos. Staff model calm and consistent approaches that encourage children to treat each other with kindness and respect. This is a key strength of the setting. Staff embed opportunities for children to recognise and talk about their emotions into the routines of the day. Almost all children will talk to a trusted adult about how they are feeling. Staff carefully consider the flow of the day and ensure it meets the needs of all children. For example, staff plan times during the day for children to be calm and to relax. To support this, they create areas that are inviting for children with dimmed lighting and high quality, cosy furnishings.

- Staff track children's attendance closely to ensure that any barriers to attending can be identified and the correct support put in place. Staff highlight the value of early learning and childcare to families through parental leaflets and ongoing communication.

- Staff are committed to providing the right support at the right time for all children. They use the helpful information provided by families within the 'Being Me' care plans as their starting point. All children have wellbeing and learning targets which support them very well to make progress, particularly in the areas of literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.

- Children influence regularly the decisions which are taken within their setting. They helped to inform recent changes made to the story and home corners. They confidently take on leadership roles with pride, such as 'photographer of the day' and as part of the 'welcome committee'. Staff make use of a range of approaches to provide well-timed, appropriate

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support for all children. For example, they plan for the explicit use of a range of more sophisticated vocabulary linked to children's interests.

- Staff, working closely with families, ensure that any barriers to children's learning are addressed early. They actively seek out the professional partners, services and expertise required to ensure that every child receives the right level of support when they need this. Children who require specific interventions have a detailed plan in place to ensure they make the best possible progress. Staff make effective use of strategies suggested to them from specialists and use these very well during individual support sessions and small group times. They have a very clear understanding of their statutory duties and keep up to date with national and local guidance. Staff are clear of their responsibilities to keep children safe and ensure they meet the care and wellbeing needs of all children.

- Staff sustain a respectful, inclusive ethos. They ensure everyone is treated with compassion and care. They have a clear understanding of the socio-economic context of the setting and ensure sensitive support for families when this is required. For example, they promote the community pantry, where a swap shop of clothes is available and families can buy food essentials at significantly reduced cost. All staff value diversity and understand the importance of children becoming global citizens. They have recently carried out focused work around this and provide opportunities for children to learn about the world in which they grow. All children experience motivating opportunities to learn about different cultures and enjoy learning from their friends about their traditions and languages. As a result, all children treat each other with respect and play very well together throughout their time in the setting.

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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.

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Practice worth sharing more widely

Approaches to Transition from ELCC to Primary 1

As part of a 5-year improvement plan underpinned by their strategic vision, values, and aims, Carleith school and ELCC have worked towards developing a dynamic curriculum that is:

- **Relevant and purposeful**
- **Interesting, fun and exciting; and driven by**
- **Play and Exploration**

These curriculum 'drivers' have created the conditions for highly effective play-centred approaches to transition.

Embedded playful pedagogy

Senior leaders within the school and ELCC coordinate a range of high-quality play based professional learning opportunities for school staff. The subsequent development of high-quality play spaces within the school is further informed by the expertise of the highly skilled nursery team. The ELC team supported the school team to develop motivating and engaging indoor and outdoor play spaces across the school. A robust, coherent play policy was developed to lay out expectations and ensure a consistency of approaches to play for all staff and learners.

Two-way working

As part of a wider transition programme, children from the ELCC benefit from daily opportunities to visit high quality indoor and outdoor play spaces within the school. Children and staff from the ELCC are included as part of the school community as they join the P 1/2 class for high quality play experiences.

The PT of early years coordinates highly effective arrangements for planning and delivery of the programme. Dedicated time for collaborative play planning between the school and ELCC allows for effective two way working, where play provocations are informed by current interests in both the ELCC and school. An effective balance of responsive and intentional planning ensures that children's learning is built on as they transition between ELCC and school play spaces.

Staff from both the ELCC and P1 class observe and record learning effectively. Using an online planning platform, observations are shared to ensure progress and inform next steps in learning.

Improving outcomes for learners

Nursery children benefit from the challenge of opportunities to have their play enhanced by learning alongside older children in school. They take their ambitious approaches back to the ELCC, for example building more complex block play structures.

At P1 and P2, children benefit from high-quality interactions provided by ELCC staff, highly skilled in responsive planning and promoting child-led learning experiences.

All play is underpinned by the school's 'learning powers' that provide a framework for consistency in high-quality experiences for children. Across the ELCC and school, adults model consistent language and promote skills development in a recognisable format that is familiar to children.

In the ELCC, children have developed strong, positive relationships with staff and children in school through their shared play. This further promotes effective transitions as children progress from ELCC into the school.

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Through these daily opportunities, ELCC children are effectively supported to become confident individuals within school spaces and learning routines.

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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.

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