

## Early learning and childcare (ELC) setting shared inspection report

### Tighnabruaich Primary Pre 5 Unit

Argyll and Bute Council

20 January 2026

In November 2025, a team of inspectors from HMIE and the Care Inspectorate visited Tighnabruaich Primary Pre 5 Unit. During our visit, we talked to parents/carers and children and worked closely with the acting headteacher and staff.

#### Key inspection findings

- Staff know children and families well. They demonstrate positive, warm and kind relationships with all children. As a result, children and families feel welcome in the setting.
- Acting senior leaders and staff need to develop an appropriate planning and assessment cycle to ensure breadth, depth, challenge and progress across the curriculum. This needs to be a balanced approach, linked to children's interests and ideas.
- The acting headteacher and acting depute headteacher had both made a positive impact on the service through their focus on the service's vision, values and aims, and their commitment to delivering the best outcomes for children, families and staff.
- Staff remained committed to getting it right for every child and worked collaboratively to ensure children's needs were met as consistently as possible.
- The team had considered all children's needs through developing an inclusive environment to support children to feel safe, secure, and included.

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            |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Leadership and management of staff and resources | good                  |
| Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment   | satisfactory/adequate |
| Learning, teaching and assessment                | weak                  |
| Nurturing, care and support                      | satisfactory/adequate |
| Children's progress                              | weak                  |
| Playing, learning, and developing                | satisfactory/adequate |
| Children thrive and develop in quality spaces    | good                  |

## Summary of inspection findings

### Key contextual Information

Tighnabruaich Primary Pre 5 Unit is situated within Tighnabruaich Primary School, in Argyll and Bute. There is one large playroom, split into two play spaces. There is an outdoor space for children, which has direct access from the playroom. The setting is registered for 29 children. There are currently 14 children accessing 1140 hours of funded early learning and childcare. Children can access the setting between two years old until they attend primary school. There are currently no children aged two years attending. The nursery is open between 9 am and 3 pm during term time. The acting headteacher has overall responsibility for the setting. The acting deputy headteacher leads learning and teaching. There are four early years practitioners and a support assistant. There have been many recent staffing challenges.

### Leadership and management of staff and resources:

We acknowledged that the service had been through a period of change following the last inspection. The changes in management and staff had been a significant journey for everyone. The acting head teacher and deputy head teacher had both made a positive impact on the service through their focus on the service's vision, values and aims, and their commitment to delivering the best outcomes for children, families and the community, while promoting the health and wellbeing of staff.

Management had a quality assurance calendar in place along with the service's improvement plan. We could see the positive impact this has had in supporting the service on their improvement journey. For example, regular staff meetings, looking at and reflecting on operational and strategic practice while supporting and addressing any concerns. As a result, the service was able to take a more reflective, proactive approach that strengthened practice and improved outcomes for children and families.

The management team took an active role within the service and knew the children and families well. They were regularly present during key parts of the day and supported staff effectively, for example during lunchtime. They also conducted observations of children and staff to contribute to the continuous improvement of the service.

Following changes in staff and management, we encouraged the service to review their vision, values, and aims, ensuring that parents, staff, and children were actively involved in the process. This would be an opportunity to include all stakeholders in the design and review, ensuring the service's vision values and aims reflect the high aspirations of everyone. This approach will further ensure that any planned

developments and improvements take account of everyone's voice, supporting the delivery of high-quality childcare and learning.

Self-evaluation was in the initial stages of development. Quality assurance and moderation activities should be developed to support the service to promote improvements and an appropriate sustainable pace of change. Implementing more focused observations and monitoring of staff practice, engagement, and delivery of experiences will support the service on their improvement journey.

We would encourage the service to embed self-evaluation and quality assurance further using the new 'Quality improvement framework for early learning and childcare sectors: early learning and childcare 2025'. The team would benefit from reviewing, reflecting, and implementing changes using the challenge questions with consideration to how improvements can be implemented as part of their development journey moving forward. The team should also take account of the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS), United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Realising the Ambition. This would strengthen the staff's knowledge and practice supporting them to identify areas where they need to improve.

Staff spoke positively of the support and input from management and said they were approachable, good listeners and they can approach them for help or advice when needed. Staff acknowledged that management recognised the challenges the nursery had been facing. Management continued to support the service to gain extra support and training to enable them to develop so they can deliver best outcomes for children and families.

### **Leadership: Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment**

The team were dedicated committed and enthusiastic about delivering best outcomes for children and families. Staff interactions with children were consistently warm, respectful, and nurturing. The team communicated effectively to support them in delivering experiences that ensure the children in their care feel valued, included, loved, and recognised. However, following the last inspection there had been a number of planned and unplanned absences within the team. This had resulted in several challenges, for example varying staff throughout the week and at times gaps in staff deployment.

Over the past year, staff had been on an improvement journey, completing a range of training to enhance outcomes and experiences for children. For example, developing the environment inside and outside, neurodivergent training and developing links with other establishments to share and learn good practice. Training undertaken had supported the team to engage in professional discussions on how to embed knowledge gained to inform their practice moving forward. The team told us they

reflect daily and while staffing pressures were occasionally challenging, they recognised the importance of professional development. As a result, we found the team had shared values and a vision of delivering positive outcomes for children.

Staff demonstrated a strong awareness of children's individual and changing needs and communicated effectively to manage coverage across the setting. Minimum staff-to-child ratios were consistently maintained, supporting children's safety and wellbeing throughout the day. However, we observed there was an additional level of support required for some children, particularly around emotional regulation, communication, and support to engage in experiences and with peers. Staff worked collaboratively and with commitment to prioritise children's wellbeing. Their positive team ethos contributed to a caring and nurturing environment for children.

The management team along with the staff had worked together effectively to support the needs of the service; for example, deployment of staff was reviewed daily and most days management supported the service over lunchtime to meet the needs of the children. However, current arrangements limited opportunities for staff to take forward leadership or champion roles and meaningful engagement in the planning and delivery of experiences. This affected staff wellbeing, as it restricted their ability to develop skills, take responsibility, and feel professionally fulfilled.

Staff remained committed to getting it right for every child and worked collaboratively to ensure most children's needs were met as consistently as possible. However, we identified the current deployment and staffing structure was not supporting the needs and outcomes of the children currently in the service. We have asked the provider to work closely with the service to ensure that planned sustained improvements in staff deployment are reviewed and implemented with a focus on children's individual needs, staff wellbeing, and the quality of care delivered. (See area for improvement 1).

### **Areas for improvement 1**

To improve the continuity of care and better outcomes for children, the provider should review the current system in place to support individual children and the consistency of the staff team.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I experience stability in my care and support from people who know my needs, choices and wishes, even if there are changes in the service or organisation.' (HSCS 4.15); and 'I am supported and cared for by people I know so that I experience consistency and continuity' (HSCS 4.16).

## Children play and learn: Learning, teaching and assessment

All staff have developed positive relationships with children. Staff know children well and respond to their individual needs. Staff identify children with additional support needs and seek support from partners in health and speech and language. Staff now must ensure children's developmental needs are met through well-planned experiences, including sensory play. Children would benefit from having a clear structure and routine for the day and staff developing effective strategies to support them to understand what is happening next. The environment does not support children to be creative or curious in their play. This results in a few children becoming demotivated or disengaged and can lead to them making poor choices due to lack of stimulation. Staff help children to become aware of their community at times by visiting the forest and the beach. Staff now need to make these visits more purposeful and meaningful to support children to develop their skills and make better progress in their learning.

Staff engage well with all children and know them individually. Staff are kind, warm and respectful to children. Staff would now benefit from refreshing their understanding of child development and how young children learn. For example, they need to extend children's learning through well-considered questioning, modelling or commentary. Staff need to increase their understanding of the needs of children who require additional support through professional learning. All staff need to develop an understanding of the most effective ways to communicate with children. For example, they need to become more skilled in using systems to support children during transitional times during the day. Children need experiences to develop their digital skills. This needs to take account of children's developmental stages. Children's rights and views are not yet strongly evident in day-to-day practice. Staff need to ensure they are always respectful in their interactions and provide suitable role modelling to children.

Acting senior leaders and staff are not yet formally planning experiences for children. Currently, staff verbally agree a plan of activities to be undertaken at the start of each week. This approach does not provide a suitable balance between intentional and responsive planning. Staff must now refer to national practice guidance to develop an appropriate planning system. This is necessary to deliver children's entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum. Staff observations of children are beginning to document learning, however these now need to be more detailed to include children's skills and progression. Staff need to agree what significant learning for each child looks like and then record this, with detail of the child's next steps. Staff need to ensure that accurate judgments of the progress children are making in their learning and development underpin the assessment information they record. Staff need to develop their understanding of effective planning and tracking for children aged two to three. Staff would benefit from further professional learning on meeting the needs of the youngest children. This will ensure that the experiences on offer are developmentally appropriate and support all children to make progress.

Staff do not yet have sufficiently robust systems in place to track and monitor children's progress accurately. Senior leaders and staff need to monitor, record, evaluate and report on children's progress across the curriculum. This should take account of the views of children, parents and partners to gain an accurate understanding of each child's progress. The limited assessment data that staff gather does not currently impact on the planning process. This lack of data impacts the interventions and additional support that is provided for individual children. Senior leaders and staff must now develop a robust tracking and monitoring system to ensure all children reach their full potential.

### **Children are supported to achieve: Nurturing care and support**

Children experienced warm, caring, nurturing and responsive care from staff supporting them to feel safe, secure, and cared for. Staff were attuned to children's emotional needs and responded with sensitivity and care. Secure attachments between children and staff were evident, contributing to a keen sense of emotional safety and wellbeing.

Staff were aware of the importance of quality mealtimes. Lunch and snack were providing some opportunities for children to be involved, develop independence through self-serving and accessing their own plates, glasses, and cutlery. Children knew the routine well and some staff when they could, sat with the children promoting healthy eating habits, conversations, and social skills.

Food choices were nutritious, and children's dietary and allergy needs were appropriately catered for. Staff had been monitoring hot lunch choices recently as they have found there had been a number of meals that children were not enjoying. We would ask that this continues to be monitored and reported to management to ensure children's choices are consistently considered. We discussed ways to further develop the lunch experience, including the introduction of lunch helpers and visual aids to support children's food choices for lunch and snack.

The staff had developed and gathered personal plan information for all children. This includes a one-page profile that gave staff some key information to support children's health, wellbeing, and safety needs. However, it was not always clear from the information provided what targets, strategies, or supports were currently in place to support children. For example, it was unclear how staff were supporting children with transitions, personal care, accessing and engaging in experiences, or interacting with peers. Staff should consider streamlining personal plan information to ensure it clearly and concisely outlines how they are supporting children to achieve positive outcomes in play and learning.

Staff should also implement, visual strategies to support them to interact and engage with children. These should be used by all staff including visitors to ensure children are included and supported.

We observed at times it was challenging for staff to provide the right support at the right time for children who became emotionally dysregulated, were nonverbal or had additional needs. Children's needs were not always fully met due to staff deployment and staffing levels. The provider should review the support needs of children to ensure timely and appropriate supports are in place (see area for improvement 1 under Staff skills, values, knowledge, and deployment).

We found there were missed opportunities for collaboration and sharing of information between the provider, professionals, and the service. As a result, the service did not always have the right information available to support families which could impact on outcomes for children. When a child requires multi agency support, other professionals should contribute to ensure children are protected, get the required support and care placing children and families at the heart of any decision making. This includes when a child starts in the service or moves between services. (See area for Improvement 1).

### **Areas for improvement 1**

To support children's health, wellbeing and safety needs the provider, management and staff should ensure they work proactively with children, families, and other professionals to identify support needs and have clear strategies in place to ensure children's wellbeing and attendance is sustained. This should include but is not limited to:

- When a child requires multi agency support, other professionals should contribute to ensure children are protected, get the required support and care placing children and families at the heart of any decision making. This includes when a child starts in the service or moves between services.
- ensure information gathered within children's personal plans is reflective of the child's current circumstances and information is used appropriately to support children's individual needs. This includes next steps and support strategies for children who require them.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS), which state that: 'My personal plan (sometimes referred to as a care plan) is right for me because it sets out how my needs will be met, as well as my wishes and choices' (HSCS 1.15) and 'My care and support meets my needs and is right for me' (HSCS 1.19).

## **Children are supported to achieve: Children's progress**

All children access a range of activities and opportunities both indoors and outdoors. Staff set up areas with a range of resources. Staff now need to ensure these are well planned, high-quality experiences which lead to the development of children's skills and to continuous progress. Staff should ensure experiences build on children's prior learning and offer opportunities to develop confidence, independence and resilience.

All children need more opportunities to listen to stories, to develop their communication and share their ideas. All children would benefit from listening to and joining in with rhymes and songs. A few children count to ten, and the majority of children explore volume when playing in the water outside. Children are beginning to learn about money. Children would benefit from further challenge to extend their mathematical skills and vocabulary. Staff use stories and cuddly/soft toys to support children to understand their feelings. Staff should now develop ways for children to communicate their feelings and emotions throughout the day.

Staff must now develop a shared understanding of collecting robust evidence. Acting senior leaders need to support staff to gather data and interpret this to inform future planning. This will support them to make accurate judgements about significant learning to track children's progress over time.

Staff value children's successes. Staff offer children praise and provide kind feedback to children. All children receive a certificate at a school assembly when they have been successful. This can be from success in the setting, or if parents share information of children's achievements from home, for example attending swimming lessons. To build on this, staff should now use this information effectively to inform planning and continue to build children's skills.

Acting senior leaders and staff are aware of most families' circumstances and know how to offer support if needed. Staff are aware of financial barriers to learning and reduce this by providing appropriate clothing and footwear and limiting the cost of activities for families. Staff do not yet have robust data to inform their planning for children who require additional support in their learning. Staff should now explore ways to ensure the impact of support strategies leads to improved outcomes for all children. This includes working in partnership with parents and partners to meet the needs of all children. A few children would benefit from consistent, agreed approaches through increased partnership working.

## **Playing, learning, and developing :**

Children were happy, having fun and enjoying their time at nursery. Children were confident within their environment and able to move freely around the playroom. There were some opportunities for children to develop skills in literacy, numeracy, and creativity. Children enjoyed playing with the dressing up, painting, exploring outdoors

in the mud kitchen, building the train set and creating structures with the bricks. Staff were warm in their approach and asked appropriate questioning skills such as 'I wonder if...' 'What about if we...' 'what would happen if' to support and scaffold children's learning.

We discussed developing sensory play further as this would help both fine and gross motor skills, provide an outlet for self-expression and help children manage their emotions and develop their vocabulary and communication skills.

Staff were reflecting and considering children's needs, interest, and abilities. The team were in the initial stages of documenting planning. We sampled evidence within the floor books, children's observations, and the service's online journal using the 'seesaw' app. However, we found at times there were missed opportunities to observe, document, engage and assess children during their play. During the inspection we found there were inconsistencies in the quality of experiences and staff engagement with the children. As a result, it was difficult for staff to plan effectively to meet the needs and interests of children, including any additional support required.

As the inspection progressed and additional staff were in attendance, we found the team were able to support and deliver consistent, uninterrupted experiences. However, we did not evidence clear progression pathways for children. We discussed with the staff and management how planning is linked and developed from observations and children's interests, and the importance of documenting this clearly.

Management and staff should consider developing a planning system that supports the delivery of quality experiences and enables them to track and plan for all children. This should include children with additional support needs where a more focused planned format is required. This will ensure children are developing a broad range of knowledge, understanding and skills for life and learning. (See area for improvement 1)

### **Areas for improvement 1**

To support children to achieve their potential the manager and staff should ensure appropriate levels of challenge and depth in learning through child led planning. Consideration should be given to how individualisation is captured within planning. In addition, planning should be closely linked to observations in children's online journals with meaningful next steps recorded. These should be monitored to ensure consistent quality of written observations. With a focus on delivering experiences that inspire children to play and learn through providing experiences that spark children's natural curiosity, sense of wonder and fun while developing their imagination, independence and offering challenge.

This is to ensure care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'My care and support meets my needs and is right for me'. (HSCS 1.19)

## Children thrive and develop in quality spaces

Children had access to a large, well-resourced playroom with free-flow access to the outdoor areas. The service made best use of available resources to create and enhance an attractive welcoming learning environment. Indoor spaces were designed to support children to actively engage in play and learning, with opportunities for exploration and creativity.

Children were confident in directing their own play, with staff responding to most children's interests and choices. Loose parts play was available indoors and outdoors, inspiring children's imagination, creativity, and purposeful play. Staff recognised the importance of daily outdoor play and understood its positive impact on children's learning and wellbeing. Children were supported to engage in some sensory and exploratory experiences such as digging in the sand, playing with the shaving foam, gloopy dinosaurs, and water play. As a result, children were developing independence, creativity, and problem-solving skills through a range of play experiences.

The outdoor play area was valued and regularly accessed, and we can see the improvements that have been made following the last inspection. We found the outdoor space, resources and experiences were providing a more varied learning environment where children could be creative, develop their language, look at early science, and engage positively with the outdoors. Staff responded to children's interests by providing resources and experiences. For example, children had great enjoyment dissolving and smashing the ice to get to the dinosaurs, children were digging and sharing responsibility in the large sand area, and children were cutting vegetables and making soup in the mud kitchen. As a result, children were able to extend their learning, collaborate with others, and engage confidently in a wide range of outdoor experiences.

The team had considered all children's needs through developing an inclusive environment to support children to feel safe, secure, and included. Staff had created a multi-sensory area which was having a positive impact on children's learning, resilience, and wellbeing.

Children's safety was supported through risk assessments for their environments and areas accessed outside the service. Staff were vigilant in supervising children as they moved between spaces, including transitions to the school hall. Staff had developed individual risk assessments for individual children who required them. This showed us that staff prioritised children's safety and well-being, while managing potential risks in the service.

Staff and children washed their hands before mealtimes. We would encourage children and staff to wash their hands at other key points during the day, including when they come in from outdoors. This will help to stop the spread of infection and ensure children and staff are kept safe and healthy.

Children's information was stored appropriately and secured within the office or the playrooms. The service entrance had a secure door entry system and visitors signed in on arrival and departure. Parents or carers were able to enter the playroom to collect their child. Staff were friendly and welcoming and used this as an opportunity to share information and involve parent or carers in their child's play and learning. We found this was supporting positive links with home and developing relationships.

### 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.

### Outcome of inspection

Our inspection findings show that the setting needs time to make the necessary improvements. We will liaise with the provider and Argyll and Bute Council regarding the setting's capacity to improve. Both HM Inspectors and the Care Inspectorate will return to carry out a further shared inspection of the ELC setting within one year of the inspection. We will discuss with Argyll and Bute Council the details of this inspection.

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