

Early learning and childcare (ELC) setting shared inspection report

Dundonald Early Years Centre

South Ayrshire Council

20 January 2026

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

Key inspection findings

- Children who are happy, engaged and making very good progress in their learning. This is very well supported by how senior leaders and staff use information about children's learning. They identify effectively when children may benefit from additional support or challenge in their learning and ensure this is in place.
- Skilled staff who provide high quality learning experiences for children in a calm and supportive learning environment. As a team, they have high standards and strive to do their best for children. They should now develop further the use of digital technologies to support children to develop skills and new understanding.
- Reflective teamwork strengthened relationships and promoted positive outcomes for children and families.
- Staff provided responsive care that promoted children's wellbeing, confidence, and emotional security.

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
Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment	very good
Learning, teaching and assessment	very good
Nurturing, care and support	very good
Children's progress	very good

Summary of inspection findings

Key contextual Information

Dundonald Early Years Centre is part of Dundonald Primary School in South Ayrshire. The centre is registered for 49 children at any one time. It caters for children aged two to those not yet attending school. There are currently 40 children on the roll. Children can access their entitlement to funded early learning and childcare (ELC) by attending between 8.45 am and 3.00 pm, during term time. Parents can purchase additional 'wraparound' time from 8.30 am to 4 pm. The headteacher of the school has overall responsibility for the early years centre and is supported by the deputy headteacher and a senior early years practitioner. Seven practitioners (6.9 FTE) and two additional support for learning assistants (0.7 FTE) support children across the week. A visiting peripatetic principal teacher supports learning and teaching one day each week.

The staff team are well established. The early years centre is part of the main school building and consists of two playrooms and children's toilets. Children access a large outdoor area from the playroom.

Leadership: Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

Staff demonstrated professional competence and a well-informed understanding of how children develop and learn. They worked well together as a team, showing a shared commitment to high expectations for every child. This was evident in both planned activities and responsive opportunities that supported children's learning and emotional development. As a result, children developed self-confidence and engaged actively in play and exploration.

Self-evaluation processes strengthened the quality of provision and promoted reflective approaches across the team. Staff regularly reviewed their own practice and used feedback to improve outcomes. This included tailored support for children and well-received family workshops. This meant staff responded effectively to individual needs, fostered children's social skills, independence, and meaningful family participation.

Leaders offered purposeful supervision and guidance that enhanced staff morale and clarified roles. A shared leadership approach encouraged professional growth and a positive team culture. This contributed to consistent care and an emotionally secure environment. As a result, staff felt motivated, valued, and proud of their contributions.

Professional learning was well embedded across the team and closely aligned with individual goals, service priorities, and national guidance. Staff engaged in reflective reading, targeted training, development days, and peer discussions to stay informed about current early years practice. This ongoing learning enhanced staff interactions, enriched children's experiences, and led to improved outcomes.

Staff-led initiatives such as Talk Boost, Bookbug, and block play effectively promoted children's language, creativity, and problem-solving skills. These experiences enhanced expression, expanded vocabulary, and strengthened peer interaction, supporting children's overall development.

The service had a clear and well-communicated vision centred on nurturing learning and achievement. This vision consistently guided daily practice and shaped the ethos of the setting. As a result, children felt safe, respected, and supported. They engaged enthusiastically in group activities, formed meaningful friendships, and developed a strong sense of belonging.

Staff were registered with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and consistently upheld professional standards. Their values-based approach safeguarded children's welfare, fostered positive relationships, and ensured a secure, inclusive environment.

Staff deployment was well-organised and responsive to routines, children's voices, and individual needs. This enabled consistent supervision and meaningful interactions throughout the day, leading to enriching experiences.

Overall, staff demonstrated very good practice, guided by shared values, teamwork, and commitment to improvement, benefiting children and families.

Children play and learn: Learning, teaching and assessment

Senior leaders and staff have created an ethos underpinned by the whole school vision of 'nurturing learning and achievement'. Staff model the school values of 'respect, kindness and perseverance' and encourage children to demonstrate them. Children are confident and increasingly independent as they follow their interests and make decisions about their learning. Most children sustain engagement for extended periods of time in their chosen experiences, for example, investigating properties of paint, block play and exploring books. Staff make very effective use of spaces available for learning, indoors, outdoors, the school building and the community. They are keen to provide even more real-life experiences for children, for example the use of real tools.

Reflecting the whole school relationship policy, staff have high and shared expectations of children. Almost all children play very well together, demonstrating respect and an increasing awareness of the needs of others. Staff have undertaken professional learning to develop highly effective skills in interacting with children,

particularly to support children's language and communication. This has impacted positively. All staff consistently interact with children in a very skilled, supportive and calm manner. Their interactions support children to be settled, engage in purposeful activities and importantly, have fun. Staff use an effective blend of questions and commentary to support, extend and challenge children's learning. Children explore digital technologies, including the interactive board and remote-control toys. Staff should now extend the use of digital technologies as a valuable tool to support and extend learning.

Staff gather a range of important information about children's learning including working with families to identify children's prior learning. They make careful observations of children as they play. Together, this information helps staff make accurate judgements about children's progress and inform what they may learn next. Staff reflect carefully on assessment information to ensure a shared understanding of children's progress and achievements. They are keen to now develop this reflection with colleagues beyond the setting. Staff document children's learning in 'special learning profiles' and share them with children and parents. Through developing the use of digital technologies, staff should increase access to empower children to reflect on their learning more spontaneously. Children, parents and staff work together to identify next steps in learning and children are very proud when they are successful in their 'special learning'.

Staff deliver a very effective balance of child-led and adult-initiated learning that is appropriate to the developmental stages of children. This includes extended periods of free flow play indoors and out and more focused group experiences. Senior leaders enable staff to meet regularly as a team to ensure a collegiate approach to planning for children's learning. Staff carefully plan relevant and motivating experiences in literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing and other curriculum areas. Over time, staff monitor they are providing a breadth of experiences across the curriculum. Staff use floorbooks to involve children in planning and documenting learning. They are keen to continue to develop further how they use floorbooks, for example ensuring children play an active role in planning their own learning.

Staff make very effective use of a range of documentation provided by the local authority to record, track and monitor children's progress across the curriculum. This helps staff demonstrate the progress children are making over time and identify where individuals may need support or challenge in their learning. The senior practitioner works with parents and other professionals, to devise helpful additional plans for children. This helps ensure children receive the support they need to help them learn. The headteacher meets with staff to review children's progress and helpfully provides support and challenge to ensure children make the best possible progress.

Children are supported to achieve: Nurturing care and support

Shared values and professional practice were clearly reflected in the quality of care provided. Staff worked together effectively to enhance their approaches and improve outcomes for children. Warm, nurturing, and responsive interactions supported children's emotional wellbeing, secure attachments, and resilience.

Children were kept safe, treated with respect, and encouraged to express their needs through both verbal and pre-verbal communication. This approach supported their decision-making and contributed positively to their developmental progress.

Personal care routines were carried out with dignity and respect, maintained privacy and offered reassurance. Staff consistently adapted their approach to suit individual needs, both during personal care routines and throughout the day. This established clear boundaries and helped children to make choices and regulate their emotions with confidence.

Transitions between activities were thoughtfully planned, which created a calm and predictable environment. Staff used observations and knowledge of each child to tailor routines. This personalised approach strengthened individualised care and deeper engagement in learning.

The inclusive setting was thoughtfully planned and promoted social interaction. Daily routines such as welcome time and mealtimes offered valuable opportunities to build relationships, boost confidence, and reinforce a sense of security.

Meals followed the Setting the Table nutritional guidance and fresh drinking water was available throughout the day. Lunchtime routines were calm and well organised, which encouraged independence, healthy choices, and social development.

Personal planning was well established and regularly reviewed with families, which played a key role in supporting children's wellbeing, growth, and progress. Plans reflected each child's strengths, needs, and interests, and were guided by SHANARRI wellbeing indicators to inform assessment and decision-making. This enabled targeted support, promoted achievement, and ensured consistent care through a shared understanding of approaches.

Staff worked with external partners to implement tailored strategies that provided additional support for children. These joint efforts significantly enhanced children's developmental progress, emotional wellbeing, and learning outcomes.

The service prioritised strong family relationships. Communication was consistent through handovers, family events, meetings, newsletters, and diary updates. This

created a warm, welcoming environment where families felt valued, respected, and involved.

Staff acknowledged the impact of family, community, and lived experiences on each child's development. They built on family strengths and responded sensitively to individual circumstances. Updates from home informed care, and barriers to involvement were reduced. This enriched children's experiences and supported them to reach their full potential.

Overall, children and families consistently benefited from high-quality, nurturing care and support. Staff's reflective practice, targeted planning, and responsive approaches contributed to meaningful experiences and positive outcomes across wellbeing, development, and relationships.

Children are supported to achieve: Children's progress

Almost all children are making very good progress as a result of high expectations of staff and high-quality nursery experiences. Staff provide very personalised support to all children that results in strong progress from individual developmental stages. Almost all children are confident and are developing a range of skills including independence and resilience in their learning.

Almost all children are increasingly able to regulate their own emotions. Staff support this very well which is enabling children to identify and talk about their feelings. Almost all children demonstrate well-developed social skills including turn taking, awareness of others and increasing empathy for the needs and feelings of others. Staff have a consistent focus on supporting the development of early language and communication for all children. They sensitively support and encourage children to communicate their thoughts and feelings including through gesture, single words, short and more sophisticated sentences. Many children enjoy the nurturing experience of sharing a book with a familiar adult. Most children can talk about favourite texts, are developing an awareness of letter names and sounds and identify rhyming words. Almost all children enjoy exploring mark making in a range of contexts, including outdoors. In numeracy and mathematics, most children use number confidently in their play. They are motivated as they explore, develop and apply skills in information handling and identifying and recreating pattern.

Almost all children benefit from, and are motivated by, exploring new learning across all areas of the curriculum. Most children confidently recall previous experiences and make links with new learning. This is helping them make sense of their world. Staff should continue to support children to develop further new skills and understanding, for example in the use of digital technologies.

Staff provide very natural and meaningful recognition and celebration of the achievements of individuals. They are careful to recognise children's strengths and developing skills which supports children's sense of wellbeing very well. Recently staff have created a 'wow wall' of children's achievements out with nursery. They should continue to encourage families to contribute. As planned, staff should ensure this information informs their planning and builds on what children already know and can do. Children are proud of their achievements, including their 'special learning' and most can talk confidently, and with pride, about their successes.

Staff have extensive knowledge of children and families. Senior leaders make robust and creative use of data to identify any potential barriers to learning and ensure an inclusive ethos. With staff, they work in thoughtful and responsive ways to, where possible, minimise any challenges to children's progress. This includes using strategies to develop and improve children's communication. When staff put additional supports in place, they carefully measure the impact to ensure effectiveness. Senior leaders and staff carefully monitor children's attendance to ensure all children benefit from ELC experiences. Staff have productive partnerships with families that successfully support children's progress, including regular sessions where parents and children can learn together.

Safeguarding (HMI)

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. At the time of the inspection, there were no identified areas for development.

Outcome of inspection

We are confident that the ELC setting has the capacity to continue to improve and so we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection.

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