

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

### Coylton Early Years Centre

South Ayrshire Council

20 January 2026

In November 2025, a team of inspectors from HMIE and the Care Inspectorate visited Coylton Early Years Centre. During our visit, we talked to parents/carers and children and worked closely with the headteacher and staff.

### Key inspection findings

- Leadership created a strong, values-driven culture where staff were highly motivated, reflective, and supported through very well-planned professional learning that improved outcomes for children.
- Children experienced warm, responsive care and nurturing relationships that promoted emotional wellbeing and confidence.
- The stimulating learning environment and the open-ended resources that support high levels of engagement, children's curiosity, creativity, and imagination. Children are having fun and are highly motivated by the rich learning experiences.
- Staff know children very well as individuals and learners. They use a range of robust information about children to plan for their learning, including additional levels of challenge and support. As a result, children continue to make very good progress since starting the early years centre.

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 | excellent  |
| Learning, teaching and assessment              | very good  |

|                             |           |
|-----------------------------|-----------|
| Nurturing, care and support | very good |
| Children's progress         | very good |

## Summary of inspection findings

### Key contextual Information

Coylton Early Years Centre (EYC) is located within Coylton Primary School in the village of Coylton, South Ayrshire. Children attend from Coylton, surrounding villages and other nearby local authorities. The centre is registered to provide early learning and childcare (ELC) for a maximum of 70 children aged from two years old to those not yet attending primary school. The current roll is 38. The building comprises two playrooms and two outdoor areas. The centre is opened from 8 am – 5.30 pm all year round. Children have varying patterns of attendance.

The headteacher of the school has overall responsibility for the centre and is supported by an ELC deputy manager. The staff team consists of a senior early years practitioner and 13 early years staff with various work patterns. One day per week, a local authority peripatetic teacher supports the EYC.

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

Children benefited from exceptionally skilled, knowledgeable, and values-driven staff who consistently delivered high quality practice. Staff engaged meaningfully at children's level, used highly positive language, and empowered decision-making and problem-solving during play. Children's achievements were competently celebrated through verbal praise and visual cues, creating a culture of success. For example, 'Make-Believe/Helicopter Stories' were expertly and skilfully facilitated by knowledgeable staff promoting creativity, pride, and confidence in children. As a result, children were deeply respected, developed autonomy, and confidently shared ideas. Cooperation and friendships flourished, and pride was evident in children's interactions.

Staff professional learning was exceptionally well-structured and firmly rooted in pedagogy—the theory and practice of teaching and learning. Staff accessed high-quality training, evaluated its impact, shared learning, and adapted environments to enhance outcomes and experiences for children. For example, visits to other early years centres informed action plans and improvements such as innovative display strategies. Initiatives like Nurturing Mathematical Thinkers introduced "Block Mini

Me's" to strengthen numeracy. Clay was introduced as a creative medium, and family engagement sessions deepened community connections. External partners commended staff expertise. These approaches resulted in richer, more challenging learning experiences that significantly improved children's confidence, creativity, and real-life application of skills.

Staff were highly motivated and reflective, demonstrating ownership of continuous improvement. Structured feedback and supervision supported professional growth. Peer observation was carried out using a traffic-light system (Red, Amber, Green). This approach indicated performance levels, this made feedback more transparent and actionable. By categorising observation into distinct level, staff were easily able to identify key areas of strength and opportunities for growth. Weekly team meetings with clear action points and annual appraisals identified individual strengths such as numeracy, digital literacy, storytelling, clay work, and design. Reflective evaluations after training sessions informed practice and drove innovation. Staff skills were expertly matched to routines and activities. This ensured sustained improvement and high quality outcomes for children. Succession planning was embedded to retain expertise. Leadership roles were visible to children, fostering engagement. As a result, children benefited from specialist expertise and strong continuity of care.

All staff were registered with a relevant registration body and demonstrated clear understanding of codes of practice. Wellbeing and reflective practice were promoted consistently from leadership down. Children's rights were embedded in practice, for example, UNCRC links in floorbooks. Robust monitoring reflected the service's strong values and ethos. This careful monitoring ensured consistently positive experiences for children and families.

A compassionate, responsive culture was evident throughout the setting. Communication was the cornerstone of a nurturing environment. Daily huddles ensured resource alignment, and transitions were meticulously planned with children's voices central through the "What matters to me" approach. Devolved leadership opportunities afforded staff opportunities to share their best practice at locality learning festivals. The service proactively signposted families to support resources. As a result, children were safe, valued, and confident, with smooth transitions and strong family support enabling them to thrive.

Staffing levels and deployment were highly responsive to individual children's needs. Flexible deployment ensured seamless coverage during transitions and outdoor play. Lunchtime was recognised as a key learning opportunity, with staff lunches scheduled after children's meals. Children enjoyed uninterrupted, high-quality mealtime experiences.

Deployment was carefully planned to ensure continuity and quality throughout the day and week. Rotas considered staff strengths, and a consistent key worker system provided emotional security. Two key workers per group supported extended

day/year continuity, supporting consistently high-quality experiences that enabled children to thrive.

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

### **Children aged two to three years**

Staff interactions with children are kind, caring and respectful. This ethos is resulting in children being happy, settled, and confident in their playroom. Staff offer a wide range of inviting experiences both indoors and outdoors. The playroom and outdoor area support children very well to explore and be curious. Children particularly enjoy and engage very well with experiences that have a sensory element. Staff plan thoughtfully to provide experiences and an environment in response to children's interests and stages of development. They use local authority developmental milestones meaningfully to support the planning process. Staff identify suitable next steps to support children very well to continue to make progress in their learning and development.

### **Children aged over three**

Children's rights and their wellbeing underpin the ethos of the EYC. Staff are professional and positive role models for children. They interact with children and each other in a calm and respectful manner. As a result of this modelling, almost all children play well together and are developing friendships. When children seek adult support to help resolve minor conflict, staff respond sensitively to support each child.

Staff consider the impact of change sensitively as children transition into the EYC, throughout the day and onto P1. They make sure children's individual needs and parents preferences are taken into account to support a smooth transition. This includes additional planning and support for children who may find transition more challenging.

Senior leaders and staff have a sound knowledge of child development and early years pedagogy. They use research and national guidance very well to influence their practice. As a result, staff provide children with high-quality learning spaces both indoors and outdoors that promote children's curiosity and creativity very well. The extensive range of natural and open-ended resources inspires children's interests, ideas and imagination. Almost all children are highly independent, motivated, and engaged as a result of the rich experiences that support learning across the curriculum. Staff plan the learning environment thoughtfully to ensure children develop skills in literacy and numeracy across experiences.

Staff engage positively in conversations with children, listening to their ideas and offering support or provocations to extend their learning. Most staff use helpful techniques to interact skilfully with children. This includes mirroring children's actions and words, commentary, and questions. As recognised, the staff team should

continue to ensure consistency in their interactions to support and extend children's learning. Increasingly, staff are making effective use of technology to support learning and teaching. Children use cameras, matrix barcodes and talking devices confidently to record and share their learning.

Staff document children's learning regularly within individual electronic journals. They use a range of robust assessment information meaningfully, including professional judgement, to demonstrate children's significant learning and achievements across the curriculum. Through progress meetings with senior leaders, staff identify accurately where children may require additional support or levels of challenge in their learning. To support professional judgements further, staff have collaborated with another EYC to support a shared understanding of children's progress. As planned, staff should continue to develop children's individual next steps to ensure they are clear and progressive. In doing so, staff could seek ways to give children greater ownership.

Staff plan for children's learning using a responsive and intentional approach to ensure children experience learning across the curriculum. Most children are leading their learning very well. They share ideas and suggestions confidently and staff respond positively to enable them to extend their play. Children who require additional help with their learning are supported very well. Senior leaders and staff make sure children receive targeted support in a timely manner. They plan relevant experiences and adult led activities that offer children the right level of support in order to make continued progress. Staff have strong professional partnerships with agencies and work closely with parents to support the planning and review process. As a result, there is a successful collaborative approach to improving outcomes for children.

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

Children experienced warm, responsive care that supported their emotional wellbeing and development. Staff greeted each child warmly by name and used gentle tones throughout the day. Calm, engaged children were observed, and staff demonstrated active listening and empathy during play. Stimulating resources supported child-led and adult-supported learning, and nurture was embedded in the ethos of the service. As a result, children developed trust and positive relationships.

Care routines were tailored to individual needs. Personalised toileting and nappy-changing schedules met children's requirements. Lunch was unhurried and social, with staff encouraging independence and adjusting the pace to suit each child. Quiet spaces were available for downtime, and children chose between relaxation or play after lunch. These approaches helped children feel comfortable and secure. The service should review extended hours provision to maintain quality experiences for all children.

Staff responded sensitively and consistently to emotions and behaviours. Comfort strategies were used effectively for separation anxiety, and visual aids and bilingual books supported children with English as an additional language. Staff anticipated anxiety and provided personalised care, ensuring emotional and language needs were met.

Children felt safe, secure, and valued. Secure attachments were evident as children sought comfort from staff and were confident enough to approach inspectors to share their work, showing pride and assurance. Emotional awareness was demonstrated through the use of the Colour Monster resource. Monitoring playroom temperature for very young children would further enhance comfort.

Personal plans were in place for every child and reviewed regularly with family involvement. Personal plans reflected holistic needs and linked to SHANARRI wellbeing indicators. They were updated after observations and parental input, supporting strong attachment and wellbeing. Personal Plans target should continue to follow the SMART approach – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound—to ensure they are clear, realistic, and trackable. Consistent updates will help maintain progress and keep goals meaningful for each child.

Connections with families were strong and enhanced children's care, learning, and wellbeing. Families were welcomed into the early years centre, which was integral to the school and village community. PEEP and Baby PEEP sessions were offered locally, strengthening early learning opportunities. These sessions gave parents ideas to help their child's learning at home. Families' views were gathered creatively through "You said, we did" displays, demonstrating responsiveness. Communication was regular, open, and two-way, with updates provided through meetings, newsletters, and digital platforms. These approaches ensured families felt informed, valued, and involved, promoting trust and continuity for children.

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

### **Children aged two to three years**

Children are gaining independence and confidence. Staff have a very good knowledge of children's individual developmental stages and provide very good support through the wide range of experiences and inviting learning environment. As a result, children continue to make progress relevant to their stage of development. Planning for children under three builds meaningfully on children's interests and prior experiences. Senior leaders and staff track children's progress regularly using developmental milestones. This informs planning for children's learning and future development meaningfully.

### **Children aged over three**

Children make very good progress since starting the EYC, as a result of staff knowing children as individuals and learners. The carefully considered learning

environment, and high-quality learning experiences, support children to develop skills progressively, particularly in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Children's individual trackers show the continued progress children make in meeting their developmental milestones. Almost all older children have achieved or are working positively towards reaching their milestones appropriate to their stage of development. Staff ensure children have a wide range of opportunities to explore and develop skills in expressive arts, science, technologies, social studies and religious and moral education. They could now consider how they demonstrate clearly within floorbooks and learning journals the progress children are making across the curriculum. This will help parents to see this progress more clearly and enable children to recognise, talk about and celebrate their achievements. Almost all children are building their early citizenship and leadership skills through key roles within the setting and community involvement. Staff make effective use of the community and provide children with worthwhile opportunities to engage in intergenerational experiences.

Most children are becoming confident communicators by using their words, actions, drawings and writing to share their experiences, ideas or identify their needs. A few children demonstrate skills in early literacy beyond their expected developmental stage. They are beginning to create, write, share, and act out their own stories. They recognise rhyme, letter sounds and names confidently. Most children demonstrate their developing skills in early numeracy and mathematics very well. They use and understand number concepts, explore shape, and gather and display information in different ways. There is a strong focus on health and wellbeing which supports children to talk confidently about how they feel and why. They are independent, building resilience, developing an awareness of how to be healthy, and demonstrating very good physical skills. Almost all children develop a wide range of skills as they explore different techniques through expressive arts and science. They explore, manipulate clay and use tools confidently to create detailed structures.

Staff value children's contributions and their achievements meaningfully through, for example, the 'wall of fame' and electronic learning journals. They use information about children's achievements from outwith the setting to helpfully plan additional experiences using key partners such as Active Schools. This enables all children to develop a wider range of physical skills.

Senior leaders analyse carefully all of the information staff have on children as individuals and as learners. They use this information very effectively to identify where children may require additional support and where children would benefit from additional levels of challenge. This informs planning and as a result, staff provide highly effective, targeted support to reduce any barriers to learning. Senior leaders monitor children's attendance and support parents well to appreciate the value of attending an early years centre. Overall, attendance at the centre is very good. When required, senior leaders and staff use the expertise of professional partners very effectively to provide additional support to children and families. Children who require additional support have individual plans that are created in

partnership with support agencies and parents. They review these plans regularly to ensure strategies continue to be successful in supporting children to learn and develop.

### **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**

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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