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

Summarised inspection findings

Fair Isle Pre-School

Shetlands Islands Council

3 November 2026

HM Inspectors gathered evidence to enable us to evaluate the ELC's work using two quality indicators from the Quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors. This document provides our summarised findings.

Key contextual information

Fair Isle Primary School and Pre-School serves the small island community of Fair Isle, the most southerly of the Shetland Islands and the most remote inhabited island in the United Kingdom. The pre-school is registered for up to six children aged between two years of age to starting school. Children can attend the setting between 8.45 am and 3 pm Monday to Friday, during school term time. There is one playroom with indirect access to an enclosed outdoor area. The shared headteacher has been in post since November 2025. They have overall responsibility for this setting and another school on Mainland, Shetland. A principal teacher works at the school full-time and is the pre-school manager. They work closely with the shared headteacher. Senior leaders work with a small team of practitioners, support staff and voluntary instructors. Prior to the current leadership structure, the pre-school experienced several changes in leadership.

Fair Isle Pre-School was inspected by the Care Inspectorate within the past 18 months. The local authority and headteacher had the option to include the pre-school as part of this inspection. We have agreed with the local authority and headteacher's decision that the pre-school will be part of this inspection.

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 foster highly positive, nurturing relationships with children and families. They create a strong culture of trust, respect and belonging where children and their families feel safe, valued and included. Children thrive within these warm and responsive relationships and approach learning with deep confidence and enthusiasm. They interact positively with everyone they meet, show care and thoughtful consideration, and contribute fully to the welcoming ethos of the setting.

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- Staff make very effective use of the setting's unique rural context to provide rich and motivating indoor and outdoor learning experiences. They plan high-quality opportunities that help children engage confidently with the natural environment, local community and wider world. Through well-considered community partnerships, outdoor learning and digital technologies, staff broaden children's experiences considerably beyond those typically available within an island setting. Meaningful partnerships with Fair Isle Bird Observatory, local and international artists and members of the community enrich children's learning and deepen their sense of place. Through interactions with airport and emergency service personnel, community volunteers and others who contribute to island life, children deepen their understanding of their unique environment. These experiences strengthen their knowledge of the important roles people play in supporting and sustaining their community.

- Staff demonstrate a very strong understanding of how children learn and develop. They use this knowledge highly effectively to adapt interactions and experiences to meet children's individual needs and interests. Staff balance carefully planned experiences with responsive practice, providing the right level of support and challenge. They judge carefully when to extend learning and when to step back, empowering children to develop their thinking, and lead investigations. Children demonstrate sustained perseverance in their learning. They develop and apply new knowledge and extensive skills across the curriculum. They make continuous connections between their learning and the world around them.

- Staff use digital technologies creatively to encourage enquiry, connection and problem solving. Their highly effective provision broadens children's experiences and extends their learning very well. Children use a wide range of digital technologies confidently to investigate ideas and share their learning. For example, children design and create a working lighthouse using circuits and microchips to deepen their understanding of how lighthouses operate.

- Staff plan children's learning very effectively. They draw on their deep knowledge of children's skills and development to plan opportunities that continually reflect their strengths, interests and emerging needs. They work very thoughtfully with children, families and partners to identify learning opportunities and agree appropriate next steps. Staff gather and record high-quality evidence of learning through detailed observations, floorbooks, learner journals and learning walls. They use personalised observations very effectively to identify strengths, monitor progress and inform planning. Staff involve children meaningfully in reflecting on their achievements and share information regularly with families. Together they create a strong, rich and shared understanding of their progress. As planned, staff should continue to explore further approaches to high-quality assessment.

- Staff use tracking and monitoring information very effectively to support children's learning and development. They work collaboratively with senior leaders to develop a clear understanding of children's progress over time. Staff track learning across literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing and the wider curriculum well. They collate and consider relevant assessment information and high-quality evidence of learning. Through regular professional dialogue, staff ensure a robust, shared understanding of children's progress and wider achievements. They identify emerging barriers to learning proactively and put in place personalised support to help children make progress. Staff use this information skilfully to inform planning and provide sensitive, well-judged challenge. As a result, they know children

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very well as learners and can demonstrate clearly the progress they make across their learning and development.

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Wellbeing, inclusion and equality	excellent

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

- Wellbeing and inclusion are central to Fair Isle Pre-School. Staff and leaders use their deep knowledge of children, families and the island community to shape exceptional provision. They create a highly nurturing, inclusive culture where children feel safe, valued and able to flourish. Staff's use of the island's unique context to provide rich, ambitious experiences is outstanding. Children thrive as confident learners with an exceptionally strong sense of identity and belonging.

- Approaches to promote children's health and wellbeing are excellent. Children demonstrate highly positive physical, social and emotional development across outdoor learning, community experiences and routines. Staff skilfully embed learning and experiences that support children's understanding about wellbeing. As a result, children can talk about their health, happiness and meaningful relationships in their lives. During visits to the beach, lighthouse and post office, children display high levels of confidence, independence and build important connections with their community. Children demonstrate remarkable skill in assessing risk, explaining clearly how to keep themselves and others safe exploring the diverse terrain of the island. Shared family-style mealtimes promote healthy choices very well and are highly nurturing, sociable experiences for children, staff and families.

- Staff create exceptional opportunities for children to connect with the life, culture and traditions of Fair Isle. Children contribute to the island's longstanding newspaper, sharing their interests and experiences. They suggest content, help to take and select photographs and share reflections about their learning supported by staff. The international readership gives children's learning an authentic purpose and reach beyond the island. Staff extend children's

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curiosity highly skilfully through interactions with visitors, who share skills including photography and Fair Isle knitting. These rich experiences broaden children's understanding of others while strengthening their connection to their island's people, culture and traditions. These unique opportunities nurture children's confidence, curiosity, pride and an enduring sense of identity and belonging exceptionally well.

- Fair Isle Pre-School is an outstanding model of nurturing practice. Staff and leaders place wellbeing at the heart of relationships, experiences and highly personalised support. Their insightful knowledge of children and families enables them to anticipate individual needs and respond with sensitivity and insight. Staff build trusting relationships that help children express feelings openly, seek reassurance and confidently draw on adults for support. They use care plans and 'What Matters to Me Most' information skilfully to personalise approaches and respond swiftly to changing circumstances. Staff adapt experiences, interactions and routines highly effectively, enabling children to explore emotions, reflect on experiences, celebrate success and make sustained progress. Staff nurture children's emotional resilience exceptionally well, reflecting sensitively on the challenges of island life. They support children to explore their feelings when they miss family members who live elsewhere. Staff help children identify positive ways to sustain these important relationships through digital communication, letters and other shared experiences. These highly responsive approaches help children understand their emotions, manage change and approach challenges and uncertainty with remarkable confidence and resilience.

- Staff ensure inclusion, equality and children's rights are embedded thoroughly in the setting. They use their deep knowledge of children and families to remove any barriers and provide highly personalised effective support. They work very closely with families and partners. This enables children to participate fully, experience success and flourish as confident, independent learners. Staff proactive approaches to prepare for and support children during periods of change and transition exemplify very best practice. Children are supported to make and nurture friendships with children from neighbouring islands. For example, staff planned and facilitated a joint nursery excursion with another setting to Mainland Shetland. This allowed children to meet up and enjoy a cultural festival together. As a result of very well-considered support, children show confidence in new and less familiar contexts and their interactions are highly positive.

- Staff and leaders demonstrate a highly developed understanding of their statutory responsibilities and use professional learning highly effectively to continually improve practice. They work sensitively with families to promote attendance and participation, respecting individual circumstances and parental choices. Families feel highly valued and supported in making decisions that are right for their children.

- Staff actively and creatively broaden children's understanding of diversity, equality and inclusion in and beyond their local context and personal experiences. They make innovative use of digital technology, partnerships such as 'Fun with Foula', and interactions with visitors to connect children meaningfully with different people from around the world. Children demonstrate curiosity and interest in other people's lives, languages and cultures. They can talk about different ways of life with increasing knowledge, while relating these to their own identity and sense of belonging.

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

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Practice worth sharing more widely

The setting's outstanding approaches to promoting wellbeing, inclusion and belonging within a remote island community. Staff and leaders draw exceptionally well on the strengths of families, community partners and the local environment to create meaningful and authentic learning experiences for children. These approaches help children develop strong relationships, a deep sense of place and identity, and confidence to engage successfully with the wider world.

The setting's highly personalised approaches to nurturing wellbeing and supporting transitions. Staff take proactive and innovative steps to help children build friendships, develop social connections and engage with peers beyond their immediate community. As a result, children display confidence, resilience and a strong sense of belonging that prepares them exceptionally well for future learning and life transitions.

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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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