

Summarised inspection findings

Hurlford Primary School Early Childhood Centre

East Ayrshire Council

16 September 2025

Key contextual information

Hurlford Early Childhood Centre is based within Hurlford Primary School. There is one main playroom divided into two separate spaces. Children have access to an enclosed outdoor area. Additionally, the nursery accesses primary school facilities such as the gym hall, dining room and school playground. Children attend from the age of three until starting primary school. The setting is registered for 40 children aged 3-5 years at any one time. Children can access their 1140 hours between 8.45 am and 2.45 pm for 38 weeks each year term time. Currently, there are 34 children on the register. The headteacher has overall responsibility for the setting and is the named manager. The early childhood centre senior lead has responsibility for day-to-day management of the nursery. The wider team includes six early years practitioners and one early years support worker.

1.3 Leadership of change

good

This indicator focuses on working together at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which reflects the context of the setting within its community. Planning for continuous improvement change should be evidence-based and clearly linked to strong self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure that the pace of change is well judged and appropriate to have a positive impact on outcomes for children. The themes are:

- developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the setting and its community
- strategic planning for continuous improvement
- implementing improvement and change

- The nursery shares the vision, values and aims with the school. These were created through consultation with all stakeholders and displayed throughout the nursery. Practitioners support children to understand the language of the values. This includes children discussing the importance of being kind and respectful to each other. Practitioners should continue to share the vision, values and aims with all children in a way which is developmentally appropriate and relevant.
- Almost all practitioners are enthusiastic, motivated and dedicated to improving their practice. All staff undertake a variety of professional learning opportunities, for example in signing to aid communication and language with children. Senior leaders carry out annual professional reviews with practitioners and plan together to address their development needs. Staff work well together as a team and engage in daily professional dialogue, sharing their professional learning and strengths with each other. This is having a positive impact on outcomes for learners.
- Practitioners are reflective and have a range of helpful leadership roles across the setting. These link directly to the nursery and school improvement plan. Practitioners should continue as planned to develop further their leadership roles. They should focus on demonstrating clearly the impact of their professional learning and development on improvements across the setting. They should measure their success based on the impact and outcomes for children and families.
- Senior leaders use a range of monitoring practice, including observation of children, evaluations of the environment, data and the views of parents to inform their self-evaluation and quality assurance processes effectively. They use a quality assurance calendar along with national guidance well to guide them in this process. Practitioners, with support from senior

leaders, engage in regular planned opportunities to reflect on the quality of the work of the setting and identify any areas for improvement. This results in a shared responsibility for implementing change at an appropriate pace.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

good

This indicator focuses on ensuring high quality learning experience for young children. It highlights the importance of a very good understanding of child development and early learning pedagogy. Effective use is made of observation to inform future learning and identify the progress made. Children are involved in planning for their own learning. Together these ensure children's successes and achievements are maximised. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of interactions
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- Practitioners are responsive to children's individual needs. They support children skilfully and demonstrate a nurturing approach in their interactions with all children. All practitioners know their children and families very well. They ensure strong relationships are at the heart of the setting. The team uses a wide range of effective strategies to support children if they require it as they settle into nursery. This is resulting in children being happy and relaxed in their setting.
- Practitioners provide learning experiences which are developmentally appropriate in both the indoor and outdoor spaces. Practitioners now need to continue to develop their purposeful play spaces further. They should ensure that the spaces motivate, inspire and encourage children to develop further their creativity and curiosity. This will help to provide children with increased challenge and to improve children's engagement in learning through play.
- Almost all practitioners interact with children positively, using conversation and commentary well to promote children's confidence and independence. Practitioners listen sensitively to children and use praise and encouragement effectively. Most practitioners provide children with time and space to explore the environment and reflect on their individual learning and interests. As a result, children develop their numeracy, literacy and health and wellbeing skills well. Senior leaders should build on existing good practice to increase the opportunities for children to learn in their local community.
- All children have access to an interactive digital board. Children enjoy using this to play games and interact with music activities. Practitioners should plan more effectively how digital technology can support and enhance children's learning.
- All practitioners observe children on a regular basis. Most of these observations are of a high quality. They record helpful information about children's learning in online profiles. These include observations, photographs and videos. Senior leaders should continue to refine these approaches to recording the progress of children. Practitioners should consider how they record children's significant learning and next steps. They should provide more detailed observations to demonstrate the skills that children are learning. This should help practitioners to identify children's progress clearly and to plan future learning.
- Practitioners have recently started using a new planning format. Practitioners plan appropriately for children's learning using a blend of intentional and responsive planning alongside the experience and outcomes for Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). Practitioners should continue to consider children's views as part of the planning process. This will ensure that children's opinions are valued, and they are involved in planning their own learning.

- Senior leaders support practitioners to track children's progress in literacy, numeracy, health, and wellbeing using local authority guidance. Practitioners now need to further embed these new their processes for planning, tracking and monitoring. This will help them plan learning experiences more effectively to support children's progress in play and learning.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning and developmental pathways

- Practitioners have well-established and successful arrangements in place to support children's transitions into primary school. This includes joint learning opportunities with children in P1. These valuable experiences support children's continuity and progression of learning. Children welcome and enjoy the ongoing opportunities to play alongside their peers. This is resulting in children being happy and familiar in their school environment.
- Practitioners provide play experiences that are responsive to children's developmental needs. Senior leaders now need to support the team to engage further with national guidance to support them to extend children's play experiences. This should help them to provide better learning experiences that support the wide range of needs of children.
- Practitioners provide appropriate play experiences that support children to develop their skills in literacy, health and wellbeing and numeracy across the curriculum. They should continue to use early level CfE experiences and outcomes to plan progressive experiences for children. This will support practitioners to plan children's next steps to further develop their progress.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on children and families – parental engagement

- Practitioners provide parents with regular information about the nursery, examples of their child's learning and events. Parents access information through online platforms, informal chats on arrival and newsletters. The setting offers literacy and numeracy family learning events to help parents to understanding their children's learning at the nursery. Practitioners should continue to seek ways to encourage parents to contribute to their child's learning journals. This will enable to parents to share and contribute to learning at home.
- Practitioners encourage families to join nursery activities. These include 'stay and play' sessions. As planned practitioners should continue to provide more opportunities for parents to be fully involved in the life and learning experiences within their child's nursery.
- Parents comment that they have positive relationships with nursery staff. Relationships are respectful and open. Staff take account of family's views through questionnaires. Practitioners should continue to gather and act on feedback from parents to increase their involvement in evaluating the work of the nursery.

2.1 Safeguarding

- The school 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 school and the education authority.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

good

This indicator reflects on the setting's approach to children's wellbeing which underpins their ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of each individual. A clear focus on wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all children to be the best they can be and celebrates their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- Practitioners maintain a strong focus on the importance of children's wellbeing. They value children as unique, capable individuals. Children use resources well to talk confidently about the wellbeing indicators. Practitioners use various strategies effectively to support children to understand and regulate their emotions. Almost all children develop the ability to manage their emotions and recognise how others feel. Children have a strong sense of belonging to the nursery as a result of the positive, respectful and nurturing relationships between practitioners and children.
- All staff know their statutory requirements in relation to safeguarding and child protection. They have undertaken relevant training and understand clearly what is expected of them. They have a good understanding of children's care needs and work in partnership with parents to meet them. Staff work with partners very effectively to address individual children's needs.
- Practitioners provide a warm, welcoming ethos which is based on children's rights. Practitioners support children effectively to develop an understanding of their rights. A few children are beginning to use the language of rights.
- Children participate in an enjoyable lunch routine in the school dinner hall. Practitioners sit with children and engage in natural, relaxed conversation. This allows the children to enjoy their food in a familiar environment. They are becoming increasingly independent as they select their food and pour their milk and water. Children would benefit from more opportunities to develop their independence further.
- Practitioners actively promote inclusion and equality well throughout the setting. They treat all children and families with respect. Practitioners working with health partners, are aware of and implement effective individualised strategies to assist children who require additional support. This is helping practitioners to identify children who require support earlier and to ensure these children make appropriate progress.
- Practitioners celebrate diversity well through cultural festivals. Practitioners should provide a wider range of resources that promotes diversity. This should develop children's understanding and appreciation for diversity within their setting and local community.

3.2 Securing children's progress

good

This indicator relates to the development and learning of babies, toddlers and young children. It requires clear understanding of early learning and development and pedagogy. It reflects the integrated way young children learn and the importance of experiences and development happening on an individual basis within a supportive, nurturing and stimulating environment. High quality early learning and childcare contributes significantly to enhancing children's progress and achievement as they grow and learn. It can benefit all children by closing the attainment gap and ensuring equity for all. It is about the holistic nature of development and learning ensuring these foundations are secure in order to achieve future attainment success. The themes are:

- progress in communication, early language, mathematics, and health and wellbeing
- children's progress over time
- overall quality of children's achievement
- ensuring equity for all children

- The majority of children are making good progress in communication and early language. They enjoy mark-making. They develop their skills well as they attempt to write their name and draw. Children would benefit from more opportunities to develop their early writing skills through meaningful real-life contexts. Most children confidently take part in conversations with each other. They enjoy listening to stories in a group and participate in 'rhyme of the week'. Practitioners use sign language to aid communication. This is resulting in all children feeling included and happy to communicate their needs in a variety of ways.
- Most children are making good progress in numeracy and mathematics. Most children can recognise colour and shape in the environment counting to 10 and beyond. Most children enjoy a wide range of exciting science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) activities. They demonstrate enthusiasm when exploring floating and sinking objects using mathematical language. They are learning about weight as they balance objects using scales. Practitioners should continue to provide more real-life meaningful experiences in all maths and numeracy organisers for example time and money.
- Most children are making good progress in health and wellbeing. The majority of children are learning to be responsible citizens as they risk assess the outdoor area and take part in litter picking. All children are developing their gross motor skills by taking part in a weekly cycle proficiency and gym experiences.
- Children are making good progress over time appropriate to their stage of development. Most children with encouragement share what they are learning enthusiastically. Practitioners should continue to support all children to plan and reflect on their own learning. This will support children to identify themselves as independent learners. Senior leaders meet with practitioners to discuss children's progress. Practitioners would benefit from more opportunities to be involved in moderation of national Benchmarks across the early level. This should enable them to make increasingly confident professional judgements and ensure significant learning is built upon.
- Practitioners praise and celebrate children's achievements in the nursery. They encourage parents to share achievements from home in online journals. These are displayed within the nursery and results in children experiencing the feeling of success. Practitioners should monitor responses to ensure there are regular contributions from all children.

- Practitioners know their families very well and take account of their cultural and socio-economic background. They have created a nurturing, welcoming and inclusive ethos to ensure all children have equal access to learning opportunities. They signpost families to other agencies for support when appropriate. As a result, families feel well supported and children's individual needs are recognised and supported.

1.1 Nurturing care and support

Children were happy, confident, and having fun. They received warm, nurturing, and responsive care from staff which helped them feel welcomed and loved. Important information had been gathered about children before they attended the service. They were also allocated a key worker who took time to get to know their likes, dislikes, and daily care needs. This helped children to settle. Overall, staff were kind, caring, and respectful. As a result, children felt safe and secure in the service.

Where children required support with personal care, interactions were warm and nurturing. Staff sought children's permission before personal care was carried out. This ensured that their privacy and dignity was respected.

When children needed additional support, staff worked in partnership with external professionals to improve outcomes. Appropriate strategies were identified to help children develop their social skills such as regulating emotions, communication, and language. This meant children were supported to reach their potential.

Staff knew children well and personal care plans were in place which identified children's likes and dislikes. Most plans included some targets to support children's development. We asked the leadership team to quality assure personal plans to ensure that all children had identified support measures in place. This would support staff to meet children's individual needs.

Children ate their lunch together in the lunchroom which featured appropriately sized tables and chairs. This ensured their comfort and supported effective supervision. Staff sat with children as they ate. This helped create an unhurried, relaxed atmosphere that fostered a caring and positive social experience. Children were encouraged to serve their own food and drinks, which helped develop their independence. We suggested that snack time experiences also be developed to promote children's independence.

Children were kept safe and well. Medication was stored securely, and children's medication records were accurately completed. Accidents and incidents were recorded and appropriately shared with parents. These processes supported children's overall wellbeing.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: good

1.3 Play and learning

Children were happy, having fun and enjoying their time at nursery. They were confident in their environment and able to move freely around the playrooms to support their learning. Overall, there was a balance of spontaneous and planned experiences to promote children's choice and independence. Some natural, open-ended materials supported children to be creative and problem-solve.

Play areas were mostly well resourced to stimulate children's interests and support their curiosity and creativity. This supported them to lead their own learning. For example, we saw children building towers in the block area, counting the number of blocks in their tower. At times, play experiences were extended by staff through effective use of questions such as "what will happen

if". Staff should continue to develop this to support children's learning. During the afternoon, we observed that there were less opportunities for children to engage in quality interactions. We asked staff to consider this and ensure children have access to high quality play and learning experiences throughout the day.

Children's online 'learning journals' were used to capture observations of children's experiences and achievements. The service had recently introduced a new planning system to help them track children's learning and identify any support needed. This was at the early stages of development and the quality of staff's observation of children was mixed. As a result, there were some missed opportunities to extend children's learning. Staff should continue to develop planning systems to ensure high quality activities and experiences are planned. This would help children make good progress in their learning.

Staff provided children with opportunities to develop early language, literacy, and numeracy skills through play. For example, children had access to stories both indoors and outdoors, and they could mark-make with a range of materials. Numbers and measuring equipment were visible in some areas. We suggested how this could be further developed to support children's understanding of numeracy. Children participated in action songs, leading some of them to explore language, numeracy, and literacy through play.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: good

2.2 Children experience high quality facilities

Children enjoyed a well-lit environment with suitable ventilation. There were homely touches such as a sofa, cushions, and bean bags. This helped them feel welcomed at the service and gave them a sense of belonging. We made some suggestions about how this could be further enhanced by incorporating real-life resources throughout the service.

Cosy areas supported children to rest, relax or sleep when needed. Sleep mats and blankets were provided, and well-planned areas allowed children to engage in quieter activities. This supported them to rest and regulate their emotions.

Overall, toys and resources were available to stimulate children's interests, imagination, and curiosity. For example, we saw children having fun in the home corner, playing at families. Whilst children did not have free-flow access to the outdoors, they had regular opportunities to play outside. Children enjoyed putting on their own performances using musical instruments and a microphone in the garden. We made some suggestions about how children's access to outdoor play could be further developed.

Children's information was stored appropriately and secured within the playrooms. The service entrance featured a secure door entry system, and risk assessments were in place to maintain a safe environment both inside and outside. This helped keep children safe.

Displays throughout the nursery helped celebrate and recognise children's learning and achievements. Visual timetables were used to support children understand the daily routine. We suggested that some displays be lowered to ensure children could fully engage with them.

Some infection prevention and control (IPC) measures were implemented to keep children safe. For instance, tables were cleaned before and after meals, and staff and children washed their

hands frequently throughout the day. Any IPC issues were quickly identified and resolved. This reduced the risk of infection and supported children's overall wellbeing.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: good

3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well

The staff team engaged well during the inspection process. They were receptive to our suggestions for improvement, and they made some positive changes before the inspection was concluded. This supported a culture of continual improvement.

The service had developed a monitoring calendar and an improvement plan, identifying key priorities to support development and improvement. This included identifying roles and responsibilities throughout the team. Monitoring of children's personal plans and new planning processes were key areas identified, and these were still being developed. The leadership team identified areas of strength and improvement and shared this with staff. This supported staff to reflect on their practice and identify any training needed.

Staff felt supported to work together as a team. Time allocated to meet as a team allowed staff to discuss children, experiences, areas that were working well, and areas for improvement. This supported better outcomes for children.

The leadership team had recently implemented East Ayrshire's planning processes and developmental trackers to monitor children's progress over time. This will help them plan learning experiences more effectively to support children's play and learning. The implementation of this was still in its early stages. We encouraged the leadership team to continue to embed and evaluate these recent changes. This would allow them to identify what is working well and what needs to be improved, promoting positive outcomes for children.

Staff had developed positive relationships and effective communication with parents. Parents were invited to parents' 'Stay and Play' and 'PEEP' sessions, and staff communicated regularly through online learning journals and newsletters. This built positive relationships with parents and helped meet the needs of the children.

Staff leadership roles were in the early stages of development. Staff had been consulted on their roles, resulting in plans for them to lead initiatives and programmes they were passionate about. For example, identified 'champion' roles in communication. This should support staff to lead improvements based on their interests.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: good

4.3 Staff deployment

Staff were warm, welcoming, open, and honest throughout the inspection. The service was suitably staffed to meet children's needs. Staff communicated effectively to support an inclusive ethos within the nursery environment. They kept up to date records and communicated regularly to ensure that children were always accounted for. This fostered a positive environment for children to feel safe and secure while engaging in play and learning opportunities.

Staff warmly welcomed parents on their arrival at nursery, and they communicated well during drop-off and pick-up times. This supported positive transitions between home and nursery. A 'PEEP' group and 'Book bug' sessions encouraged some parental involvement. Whilst parents could access the reception area, they were not encouraged to access the playrooms. We asked that staff review this to foster stronger relationships with families.

A senior practitioner was deployed in the playroom at key times of the day. This supported positive working relationships and provided opportunities for role-modelling and professional dialogue. Staff felt supported by the senior practitioner, and they felt they could raise concerns when they arose. This helped them to feel valued and, as a result, staff were happy, committed to their roles, and they collaborated well as a team. This supported a warm and nurturing environment for children.

Several changes had been introduced to the staff team to support improvements within the service. For example, new planning methods, tracking systems, personal plans, and online learning journals. The staff team should continue to embed these changes and evaluate the impact of any changes. This will ensure continued improvements and lead to more positive outcomes for children.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: good

During the previous Care Inspectorate inspection, the setting had no requirements and no areas for improvement. As a result of this inspection, there are no requirements and no areas for improvement.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland 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.