

Summarised inspection findings

Muirkirk Primary School Early Childhood Centre

East Ayrshire Council

8 November 2022

Key contextual information

Muirkirk Early Childhood Centre is situated within Muirkirk Primary School. Children attend the centre from 08:45 to 14:45 each day to ensure children receive their entitlement of 1140 hours. There are 28 children aged two to five years in the early childhood centre. Four of the children are two years old and 24 are three to five year olds. The early childhood centre is led by the headteacher. A senior lead practitioner, six early years practitioners and two support assistants support the early childhood centre.

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 early childhood centre developed its vision and values by consulting the whole school community. A child in the early childhood centre designed the poster of the values which is displayed throughout the school. Children enjoy talking about 'Mr SHARP' which is an anagram of the values. They also enjoy receiving certificates when they demonstrate the values. The vision, values and aims are brought to life through day-to-day practice and interactions with children, parents, visitors and with each other.
- The headteacher plays an active role in leading the early childhood centre and supporting the senior lead practitioner. The senior lead practitioner, in turn, leads and motivates practitioners well to improve the early childhood centre. As a result, children have positive early learning and childcare experiences in a stimulating and attractive learning environment. After consultation with parents, the headteacher, senior lead practitioner and practitioners have together implemented well 1140 hours of funded early learning and childcare in the early childhood centre. This is in line with parents' wishes. All children in the early childhood centre enjoy learning activities in a nurturing environment based on the principles of Realising the Ambition: Being Me (2020). This ensures that learning is motivating and meaningful allowing children to lead their learning in a wide range of learning environments.
- The joint improvement plan for the school and early childhood centre has a wide range of priorities based on self-evaluation activities including gathering views from partners, parents and children. As discussed, it would be beneficial to have fewer clear measurable targets that will demonstrate the impact of change on children. A number of interventions have led to improvements such as those focussed on improving communication. It would be beneficial to evaluate fully the impact of each of the different interventions and focus more clearly on those that will have the biggest difference for children.
- The senior lead practitioner and practitioners are a cohesive and highly reflective team. The senior lead practitioner uses learning from her degree in childhood practice well to build capacity and a culture of learning among all the practitioners. Commendably, all practitioners are now supporting each other well as they study towards degrees in childhood practice. They enthusiastically demonstrate how this professional learning is impacting positively on practice

in the early childhood centre. For example, carrying out 'tests of change' have resulted in improvements in learning experiences in the early childhood centre.

- All practitioners have leadership roles based on their skills and knowledge. These include literacy, numeracy, outdoor learning, and health and wellbeing for children and practitioners. The senior lead practitioner is a communication champion and has effectively led work which resulted in communication accreditation of the early childhood centre from speech and language therapy. Practitioners work hard to build their knowledge through research and influence practice in relation to their leadership area. This is evident in the early childhood centre. We have asked senior leaders to monitor closely and evaluate the effectiveness of these leadership roles. This will ensure improvements continue to have a positive impact. Practitioners should continue to look at ways to increase the leadership roles of children in the early childhood centre.

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

- Children are happy, settled and enjoy their time in the early childhood centre. All children benefit from strong nurturing relationships with practitioners which help build individual children's confidence and self-esteem. Children are supported effectively by practitioners to play together well. Practitioners promote children's rights throughout the early childhood centre.
- Children are familiar with their daily routines and engage well when playing in stimulating learning environments, both indoors and outside. This is supporting the development of children's language and communication skills. Good use is made of the surrounding area to extend learning opportunities.
- All interactions between staff and children are consistently warm and supportive. Practitioners listen well to children and respond to their individual interests. There are good examples of practitioners using questions appropriately to support children to extend their thinking. This now needs to be more consistent to deepen and extend children's thinking and learning. All practitioners demonstrate commitment to ongoing professional development, which is having a positive impact on the quality of children's experiences.
- Practitioners are responsive and provide experiences that reflect children's interests and ideas. Children are encouraged to plan for their learning. Practitioners are well-placed to encourage children to reflect more on their planning and what they have achieved and learned at the end of each session. Practitioners should continue to support children to develop their use of the language of learning and to identify the skills they are developing.
- Practitioners know individual children very well. They make observations of children at play. They document individual observations of children within learning journals. This information is shared with parents. Practitioners should build on these approaches for all children to help demonstrate clearly each child's progress across the curriculum.
- All children have a key worker. This is particularly supportive for the children under three years of age. Practitioners have good knowledge of how children in this age group develop, play and learn. A useful system of tracking and monitoring progress is also in place for this age group.
- Practitioners are supported well by partners to provide targeted support for children. For example, weekly support from speech and language therapy helps expand children's language skills. The speech and language therapist also advises on appropriate interventions for specific children.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning and developmental pathways

- The curriculum rationale has been developed in consultation with the school community. The rationale has a strong focus on wellbeing and nurture which is evident in the early childhood centre. Practitioners working with children under the age of three use national guidelines to plan appropriate experiences for children. They promote strong nurturing relationships and support children to explore and develop their skills. Practitioners use the experiences and outcomes in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing from Curriculum for Excellence to plan for children's learning. They should continue to address holistically the wide range of experiences and outcomes, focussing on the development of knowledge, understanding, skills and communication.
- Children use a variety of digital technologies to support their learning. For example, children use tablet computers independently to record their achievements and involvement in experiences. There is scope to develop this further. The outdoor environment, including the woodlands, is used well and should continue to be a focus for development. Practitioners should continue with plans to use the local community to enrich learning experiences for children.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on children and families – parental engagement

- Practitioners have established positive trusting relationships and effective communication with parents. Parents are kept informed of their children's experiences and progress in learning in a variety of ways. These include useful informal and formal chats, newsletters, social media, the school app and children's individual online and paper learning journals. Practitioners plan to reintroduce 'Stay and Play' sessions to offer parents opportunities to spend time in the early childhood centre, allowing them to observe how children learn in the centre. As discussed, practitioners should share the learning targets in a parent friendly way with families to reinforce learning at home.
- Parents have benefited from attending a series of workshops run by practitioners such as 'Peep learning together'. Partner agencies have also delivered effective workshops for parents. Practitioners are planning a series of events to strengthen parental engagement within the early childhood centre. They provide useful advice and information to enable parents to access sources of support in the community and local area. This includes information about family support programmes and health services available to support families and children.

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

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

very 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

- The wellbeing of children is paramount in the early childhood centre. The headteacher and all staff have positive and nurturing relationships with children. These relationships impact positively on children's wellbeing. Children are happy and relaxed. They enjoy the companionship of caring adults and readily approach practitioners when they need support or assistance. Practitioners use their professional knowledge of children's social emotional and wellbeing, nurture and attachment well to ensure that children are supported and ready to participate in learning experiences. They actively encourage children to show kindness and respect for others and help children to resolve any disagreements independently. As a result, children play together very well and show care and consideration for each other.
- Practitioners have a shared understanding of the national wellbeing indicators and support children well to understand them in a meaningful way. For example, children carry out risk assessments which develops their sense of being responsible. Older children 'buddy' younger children which helps them feel included. Practitioners discuss well with children how to keep themselves healthy. Staff should continue to build on their practice to support children and parents develop an awareness of the wellbeing indicators in meaningful ways. Staff should also continue to encourage children to be aware of their rights by promoting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This could be implemented in conjunction with the development of the wellbeing indicators.
- Practitioners know each child and their personal circumstances well. They have strong relationships with families, which allows practitioners to provide appropriate and sensitive support. Practitioners have a robust understanding of their statutory duties. Where practitioners identify additional support is needed, they plan for children using the local authority staged intervention process. Practitioners monitor and review children's individual plans. As discussed, they should ensure that the targets set in plans are clear and measurable. The positive partnership working with other professionals, particularly the speech and language therapist, further ensures the needs of children are met well.
- The early childhood centre has a strong sense of community where everyone is valued and included. Children are beginning to develop an awareness of diversity by celebrating events. There is scope to develop further children's awareness and understanding of diversity through a wider range of resources and developmentally appropriate experiences. Practitioners should continue to promote gender equality effectively with children, to ensure potential stereotypes are consistently recognised and challenged.

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

- Children make good progress in communication, early language, mathematics and health and wellbeing. Children choose where they want to play and enjoy exploring the outdoors and surrounding areas. Children are kind and caring towards each other and support each other as they play. They are developing confidence and teamwork well through play. For example, children work together to identify risks when they visit the nearby forest area.
- Practitioners plan for literacy and numeracy within the early childhood centre through adult-initiated experiences. Children now need to develop greater independence and application of skills through more child-initiated learning. Practitioners should continue to discuss the principles of the national practice guidance, *Realising the Ambition: Being Me* to support these discussions.
- The majority of children are making good progress in communication and early language. Most children listen well to each other and engage in conversations with adults and their friends. Children enjoy reciting rhymes as part of group times and sharing books with each other and with staff. A few children recognise the link between the written and spoken word. The majority of children are developing an interest in early writing skills.
- The majority of children are making good progress in numeracy and mathematics. They are developing an awareness of counting strategies and recognise numbers through play. A few children identify shapes and are developing appropriate language to describe size and position.
- The headteacher and practitioners track and monitor children's learning effectively. This tracking provides good evidence of children's progress over time. This evidence and regular meetings to plan interventions to reduce any barriers to children's progress are having a positive impact on children's progress and achievements. Children would benefit from clearer, more easily understood targets to enable them to see their progress and plan their next steps in learning.
- Children are developing their understanding of how to support their own wellbeing through daily routines such as snack and lunchtime. Children develop fine motor skills, through for example, manipulating dough tools and using knives to help prepare healthy snacks. Outdoors, children are developing a range of gross motor skills including climbing and balancing.

- Children's achievements are actively encouraged and celebrated by the team through weekly certificates and displays on the achievement wall. Achievements such as helping other children settle in the early childhood centre are particularly celebrated at this time of the year. Children are very proud of achievements celebrated in this way. They are developing an appreciation of the skills and qualities of their friends. Practitioners encourage parents to share children's achievements from home.
- All staff understand well the socio-economic context of the children and take very positive steps to ensure equity for all. They treat families with fairness and respect. Children with barriers to learning are supported well to ensure that they make progress in their learning. This includes providing appropriate clothing to enable all children to benefit from outdoor learning effectively. Staff provide individual, bespoke support for identified children in order to accelerate their progress. This includes support from partners such as speech and language therapy.

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.