# Sgoil Araich Ghaidhlig Loch Abar
# Day Care of Children

Bun-Sgoil Ghaidhlig Loch Abar
Ardgour Road
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**Type of inspection:**
Unannounced

**Completed on:**
11 June 2026

**Service provided by:**
Highland Council

**Service provider number:**
SP2003001693

**Service no:**
CS2003013559

## About the service

Sgoil Araich Ghaidhlig Loch Abar is registered to provide a day care of children service to a maximum of 50 children aged from three years to those attending primary school at any one time. The nursery and out of school care service is operated by Highland Council. The service operates during term time only. At the time of the inspection, there were up to 28 nursery children in attendance, and up to seven children in attendance within school age childcare.

The nursery is located on the premises of the Bun-Sgoil Ghaidhlig Loch Abar Primary School and has its own separate entrance. The accommodation comprises of two large playrooms, a kitchen area and a reception area with cloakroom facilities. Shared toilets and a nappy changing space are located between the two playrooms. There is an enclosed outdoor play area which can be directly accessed from both indoor playrooms. The school age childcare service operates from one of the nursery playrooms and has direct access to the outdoor space.

## About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Wednesday 10 and Thursday 11 June 2026. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate. To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included previous inspection findings, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- Spent time with children using the service,
- received completed questionnaires from parents and staff,
- spoke with staff and management,
- assessed core assurances, including the physical environment,
- observed practice and children's experiences, and
- reviewed documents.

As part of our inspections, we assess core assurances. Core assurances are checks we make to ensure children are safe, the physical environment is well maintained and that a service is operating legally. At the time of this inspection, no improvements were identified relating to core assurances.

## Key messages

Children were supported by kind and caring staff who knew them well and understood their individual needs and preferences.

The well laid out environment meant children settled quickly on arrival and were happy, contented and had fun as they led their own play.

Staff were enthusiastic about keeping up to date with current practice through training and shared learning.

The manager and team had a clear vision for improvement and demonstrated commitment to supporting positive change for children and their families.

Quality assurance and monitoring processes were beginning to provide the leadership team with better oversight of practice and areas for development and now need to be devolved to the staff team and embedded in practice.

## From this inspection we evaluated this service as:

In evaluating quality, we use a six point scale where 1 is unsatisfactory and 6 is excellent

| | |
|---|---|
| Leadership | 3 - Satisfactory / Adequate |
| Children thrive and develop in quality spaces | 4 - Good |
| Children play and learn | 4 - Good |
| Children are supported to achieve | 4 - Good |

Further details on the particular areas inspected are provided at the end of this report.

## Leadership 3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

**Quality indicator - Leadership and management of staff and resources**

We evaluated this quality indicator as satisfactory/adequate where strengths just outweighed the weaknesses.

The leadership team had identified that the service vision, values and aims were due for review. This was recognised as a valuable opportunity to meaningfully engage children, staff and families in shaping a shared direction. There was a clear appreciation of the unique role of Gaelic within the setting, with a strong commitment to promoting both the language and culture. The ethos across the setting was positive and nurturing. Staff and children showed kindness, respect and a shared responsibility for caring for one another. This contributed effectively to a welcoming and inclusive environment which supported children's wellbeing.

Children's views were gathered and were beginning to influence aspects of the service. For example, children's comments had been captured and considered during recent developments to the outdoor environment. This demonstrated that children's voices were valued. Approaches to capturing and using the views of families were less well developed and not yet consistently informing improvement priorities. Leaders had identified this within the improvement plan for the service.

The head teacher had recently taken up the post on a temporary basis. They had a clear understanding of the setting's strengths and had involved staff in shaping next steps. Staff demonstrated an understanding of their role in driving improvement and were beginning to feel more confident and empowered in driving forward changes. They told us that they felt well supported by the leadership team. The re-introduction of regular time for professional development was beginning to enable staff to reflect on their practice and consider how this impacted outcomes for children. For example, one staff member described how they had used this time to research ways of providing more challenge in numeracy experiences for children in their care. This reflected a positive shift towards reflective practice and professional enquiry. The leadership team recognised that there was scope to strengthen links between staff skills and interests and leadership opportunities. We agreed that, if carefully paced alongside other improvement priorities, this had the potential to improve outcomes for children.

Leaders had begun to strengthen self-evaluation processes. Staff had increased opportunities to reflect on practice, and discussions were more focused on evaluating the impact of care on children's experiences. Staff engagement in self-evaluation had improved, and they had started to use national guidance and frameworks to support their thinking. This included early use of quality frameworks and practice guidance. While these developments were positive, self-evaluation remained at a relatively early stage and had not yet led to sustained, measurable improvements across all areas. Approaches to identifying and sharing effective practice were at an early stage of development. Staff expressed an interest in professional learning through visits to other settings and welcomed opportunities for practitioners to visit and engage with their Gaelic provision. We agreed that pairing such opportunities with structured team reflection and links to best practice guidance, could enable new ideas to be effectively embedded into practice to benefit children.

Leadership arrangements had been put in place that enabled the service to drive forward improvements. At the time of the inspection, the leadership team comprised the head teacher and officers from the local authority early years team. They had taken action to address previously identified weaknesses in quality assurance and monitoring by introducing systems to identify, respond to and learn from issues promptly.

This was beginning to lead to improved consistency in key areas such as personal planning and medication management, with staff demonstrating greater confidence in their practice. A clear action plan had been developed, with roles, responsibilities and timescales in place. This was beginning to enable leaders to track progress effectively and to identify further areas for monitoring and development. In order to ensure that the pace of change is maintained and the culture of continuous improvement is embedded, the service should develop sustainable systems for quality assurance and leadership at all levels. We made an area for improvement to support this (see area for improvement 1).

**Quality Indicator - Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment**

We evaluated this quality indicator as good, where there were important strengths within the setting's work and some aspects which could benefit from improvement.

Children benefited from consistently warm, responsive interactions with staff, which helped them feel secure, confident and valued. Staff showed a sound understanding of child development and adapted their approach to suit different ages and stages. For example, during imaginative play, staff extended learning in Gaelic, using visuals and building on language structures. This supported children's communication skills and confidence across both languages.

Staff were deployed effectively to support children's learning and wellbeing. They positioned themselves well within the playrooms, allowing them to observe and respond to children across large spaces. Interactions during play were meaningful and helped extend learning. As a result, children were well supported and engaged in their play.

Professional learning was well planned and linked to improvement priorities. Previous one-to-one discussions with the former manager had helped identify strengths and development needs, providing a strong foundation for improvement. Ongoing support from the head teacher, along with regular staff meetings, ensured continuity and time to engage with guidance on aspects of practice such as SIMOA, observations and planning approaches. Access to funded training, particularly in Gaelic, had also supported staff development. As a result, staff were becoming more confident, sharing ideas more openly and feeling valued in their roles.

Staff spoke positively about further professional learning, including planned training on observations and inclusive practice. They were keen to visit other settings to learn from effective practice and to share their own Gaelic Medium Education approaches. This demonstrated a clear commitment to improving practice and outcomes for children.

Staff were increasingly engaged in reflective practice. Time during meetings supported discussion and evaluation, and staff were beginning to use national guidance to identify areas for improvement. This was helping to build confidence and a sense of ownership of the improvement agenda, although this approach would benefit from being embedded more consistently.

Staff demonstrated a strong commitment to child-centred practice. They respected children's views and showed enthusiasm when discussing improvements to children's experiences. Teamwork was positive, with staff supporting each other and expressing satisfaction in their roles. Staff felt well supported by the head teacher and early years team, which had helped them manage a significant period of change. Overall, this created a positive ethos that supported children's wellbeing and learning.

It was recognised that staff shortages and absences had impacted the pace at which improvements could be implemented. Despite these challenges, the team had demonstrated resilience and had made progress. Their continued commitment to improvement, alongside the support structures now in place, had the potential to further improve outcomes for children.

### Areas for improvement

1. To support improved outcomes for children the provider should further develop and embed effective systems of quality assurance. This should include but is not limited to:

a) All quality assurance, self-evaluation and monitoring is managed by the leadership team within the service.
b) Staff continue to be supported to develop their knowledge and understanding of self-evaluation processes and to increase their involvement in continuous improvement work.

This is in order to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards, which state that: 'I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes' (HSCS 4.19).

## Children thrive and develop in quality spaces 4 - Good

We evaluated this quality indicator as good, where there were important strengths within the setting's work and some aspects which could benefit from improvement.

Children enjoyed playing in the two large, bright playrooms which were connected by a kitchen and shared toilet facilities. Both rooms were thoughtfully organised and well resourced, offering a range of engaging experiences, including sensory and messy play, which children accessed with enthusiasm. Homely touches, such as soft furnishings and comfortable seating, contributed to a calm and cosy atmosphere. Parents told us that their children enjoyed the spaces available to them. One parent said, "The staff always have fun planned and/or sensory play out for the children for every day use."

Children had regular access to outdoor play and engaged well in their experiences. During the inspection, they enjoyed splashing in puddles after heavy rain, showing enthusiasm and curiosity. Water play, both planned and spontaneous, supported children's enjoyment and engagement. As a result, children experienced positive, active outdoor learning. The outdoor grassy area was less well maintained, and recent policy changes had reduced access to loose parts. This limited the richness of play opportunities. Staff told us that they were keen to redevelop this area. We agreed that improvements could enhance the quality of outdoor play while maintaining a safe environment.

The environment indoors and out was secure, with effective systems to ensure children were accounted for, particularly during movement between areas. Effective communication, including the use of walkie-talkies, helped staff coordinate supervision across different areas, particularly during transitions. The self-registration system for outdoor play promoted responsibility while ensuring children were accounted for at all times. As a result, children experienced a secure environment where their wellbeing was prioritised.

At the time of inspection, some toilet doors had been propped open. This did not support children's right to dignity and privacy and was addressed promptly on the first day of the inspection. Handwashing routines were well established and effectively supported, particularly through the use of keyworker groups, which helped ensure that hygiene practices were embedded consistently throughout the day. This helped to keep

children safe by minimising the potential for spreading infection.

Risk assessments were in place and completed appropriately, reflecting a sound approach to identifying and managing potential hazards. Staff demonstrated a good awareness of risk in practice and were able to articulate how they supported children to understand and manage risk safely. This was effectively linked to the setting's use of SIMOA resources. Staff had engaged positively with this approach, using visual prompts such as the "elephant" at exit points and within the environment to reinforce key safety messages. The practice of children taking the elephant home also strengthened links with families, supporting shared understanding of safety and consistent messaging.

Information was stored securely and was easily accessible to staff when required. Children were familiar with their learning profiles and happily accessed them to view and to share with staff. This showed that information that was meaningful to children was accessible to them at any time, helping them to build confidence and self-esteem.

## Children play and learn 4 - Good

We evaluated this quality indicator as good, where there were important strengths within the setting's work and some aspects which could benefit from improvement.

Children benefited from a wide range of resources, spaces and interactions that supported meaningful play and learning. They had time and freedom to explore at their own pace, with staff sensitively joining play to extend learning. For example, staff supported imaginative play when children created a train from blocks and invited them to board. This increased engagement and enjoyment and supported children to think creatively and develop their ideas. As a result, children were motivated, curious and actively involved in their learning.

Staff demonstrated a clear understanding of the value of sustained, uninterrupted play. Children could leave their play at lunchtime and return to it later, allowing them to build on their ideas. This supported deeper, more meaningful learning and helped transitions back into the playroom to be calm and settled. Children could freely access open ended play materials such as craft and construction, where they showed high levels of engagement. This supported their curiosity, creativity and problem-solving skills. Opportunities such as water play further promoted independence, with children leading their own learning and decision-making. Overall, this supported children's confidence and sense of ownership over their play.

Children's rights were promoted as they followed their interests for large parts of the day, with staff respecting and supporting their choices and preferences. Parents agreed that staff knew their children well. One parent told us, "My child has a keen interest in farming and the key worker embraces this interest, widening their vocabulary and knowledge." Keyworker roles were clearly understood and were used effectively during routine parts of the day, such as handwashing, ensuring these transitions were well managed and purposeful. However, there was a need to ensure that groupings remained flexible and did not inadvertently restrict children's ability to move freely between spaces or access a wider range of experiences.

The use of Gaelic language was embedded throughout the day. Staff communicated consistently in Gaelic and children responded with confidence and understanding. The use of Makaton alongside Gaelic supported inclusive communication and helped all children to participate. Parents valued this strongly, particularly the opportunity for children to develop Gaelic language skills. One parent told us, "I like that my child is learning a language that helps preserve our country's heritage." A few parents told us that they were not aware of

how immersed their child was in Gaelic language. The service had identified this as an area for ongoing development. We agreed that this would continue to support children's language development and their sense of cultural identity.

Staff used a range of effective interaction techniques, including questioning, commenting and wondering aloud, to extend learning. These approaches supported children's thinking and language development in a natural way. Digital learning was beginning to be used appropriately, for example when children researched stick insects. Children could talk confidently about their learning and the tools they used. As a result, children were developing communication skills and becoming more independent learners.

Approaches to assessment were at an early stage of development. Learning profiles included learning observations, and in some cases next steps had been identified. However, this was not yet consistent across the setting. Plans were in place to improve this through targeted staff support and protected time. Increasing opportunities for parents to engage with profiles would further strengthen this work. This would help to ensure that assessment clearly supports children's progress.

Floorbooks showed that children's interests were beginning to inform planning in some areas. Staff were developing confidence in using observations to plan experiences, but this was not yet consistent. Strengthening this approach across the setting would ensure children's voice fully informs learning and leads to a balance of responsive and intentional planning.

Within the out of school care provision, staff effectively considered children's age range and interests to plan experiences. Children were involved in decision-making, such as voting for topics. Staff adapted activities to suit different ages and stages, ensuring all children could take part. Children spoke positively about their experiences and valued the range of activities available. Overall, this provided an inclusive and engaging environment that supported children's enjoyment and development.

## Children are supported to achieve — 4 - Good

We evaluated this quality indicator as good, where there were important strengths within the setting's work and some aspects which could benefit from improvement.

Staff demonstrated a consistently caring and nurturing approach in their interactions with children. They warmly welcomed children into the setting, and this helped them to settle into their play quickly. One parent told us, "My child is excited to go and to enter the building, there is always a warm welcome in the morning from kind, compassionate and trustworthy staff." They communicated using calm and gentle tones, creating a respectful and supportive atmosphere which helped children to feel secure and settled. This caring ethos was evident across the setting and contributed to children's overall wellbeing.

Mealtimes were well organised and provided positive social experiences for children. Lunchtimes were relaxed, sociable and safe, with children being supported to wash their hands beforehand. Children were encouraged to develop independence through everyday tasks such as pouring their own drinks, clearing plates and selecting their own dessert. Snack time in the playrooms offered a homely and engaging experience for pre-school and school age children. Children took on helper roles with enthusiasm, helping to prepare food, lay tables and serve their friends. In the pre-school, staff used these opportunities effectively to extend learning, incorporating counting and rich vocabulary in both Gaelic and English. This contributed to a meaningful and enjoyable routine that supported wellbeing and learning.

Children benefited from care routines that were meaningful and supported their independence and social

development. Individual personal plans contained information and strategies which supported staff to meet children's needs and preferences. These plans were regularly reviewed in partnership with parents. This ensured that children's needs were well understood and supported by everyone, contributing to continuity of care. This resulted in children receiving consistent, responsive care that met their individual needs.

The environment supported social interaction and opportunities for rest and relaxation. Cosy, comfortable areas were available and used by children throughout the day, enabling them to have quiet time or rest whenever they needed it. Flexible approaches were used to support children's transitions into the setting, with parents welcomed into playrooms to help settle children when needed. Transitions beyond the setting were also well supported. Information for children moving to Primary 1 was shared with parents in a timely manner, and experiences such as school visits helped children to feel prepared and excited about this next stage.

Within the school age childcare provision, transitions from the school day were well managed. Clear communication with teaching staff and established registers ensured children were safely accounted for. A designated meeting point supported smooth collection procedures. Children were actively involved in many aspects of the service, such as snack preparation, taking pride in helper roles and contributing to planning experiences for the group. As a result, children experienced a safe, inclusive environment where they were respected and actively involved in decisions about their care.

Medication was stored safely and appropriately. Staff demonstrated good awareness of the specific needs of children within their keyworker groups and ensured medication was administered at the correct times. However, some gaps were identified in relation to management of medication information. These included ensuring medications were correctly named on all documentation and ensuring administration records were consistently signed by parents. The service had already identified this as an area for development, and we discussed ways in which procedures could be further adapted to ensure full compliance with best practice and legal requirements.

The setting had established a variety of approaches to engaging with families. These included daily informal conversations, noticeboards, stay-and-play sessions and the use of a digital platform. Parents spoke positively about these opportunities, particularly the stay-and-play sessions, and the service had gathered feedback to inform ongoing improvements. Recent parent evenings had been well received, providing meaningful opportunities for discussions about children's wellbeing and learning. Staff told us that they enjoyed these opportunities to connect with families and were keen to develop further ways of involving parents in their child's learning journey. Some parents told us that they would welcome more opportunities to speak with staff about their children, and we shared this with the service for their consideration.

## What the service has done to meet any requirements we made at or since the last inspection

### Requirements

#### Requirement 1

By 9 March 2026, the provider must ensure that management arrangements are robust and effective in delivering safe, high-quality outcomes for children. To do this the provider must, at a minimum, ensure:

a) Effective systems are put in place for monitoring the effectiveness of the leadership arrangements.

This is to comply with Regulation 4 (1)(a)(b) (welfare of Users) of The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011(SSI 2011/10). This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes' (HSCS 4.19).

**This requirement was made on 11 November 2025.**

**Action taken on previous requirement**

Since the previous inspection, the provider has appointed an acting head teacher to lead the service. The head teacher has made progress in addressing the issues raised in the previous inspection. Both he and the staff team have received significant support from the local authority early years team, who have undertaken a range of management responsibilities and have also supported the head teacher to fulfil many aspects of the detailed action plan for improvement. To sustain progress against the improvement agenda, the provider has developed a long-term plan to reincorporate all management duties within the service. The provider has recognised that ongoing, continued support from the early years central team will be essential while overall leadership is returned to the service, and has made arrangements for this.

This requirement has been met.

**Met - within timescales**

#### Requirement 2

By 31 January 2025, the provider must ensure improved outcomes for children by implementing effective systems of quality assurance. To do this, the provider must, at a minimum, ensure:

a) the manager effectively monitors the work of each member of staff and the service as a whole;

b) regular and effective support and supervision for all staff is implemented; and

c) clear and effective plans are in place for maintaining and improving the service.

This is to comply with Regulation 3 Principles of The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/210). This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I benefit from a culture of

continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes.' (HSCS 4.19).

**This requirement was made on 31 October 2024.**

### Action taken on previous requirement

The service has benefited from close support by the local authority early years team with a wide range of aspects of the service. This includes the development and implementation of quality assurance and monitoring systems, including auditing of personal plans and medication administration, as well as monitoring and providing support to staff on quality interactions, observations and planning. A detailed improvement plan has been developed and is being regularly reviewed and updated. The acting head teacher has a clear vision for improvements in the next school year, and staff have been involved in developing plans to achieve it. The plan includes support and supervision for staff.

To support the service to embed the new systems in place and to introduce new leaders and leadership roles, we will make a new area for improvement focusing on maintaining and reviewing quality assurance systems to support improvements and outcomes for children. This includes monitoring of learner profiles for consistency in observations, next steps and tracking of progress, and further tightening of aspects of medication administration.

This requirement has been met.

### Met - outwith timescales

## What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection

## Areas for improvement

### Previous area for improvement 1

The provider should develop children's personal plans and support staff to use this information effectively to support meeting children's health, welfare and safety needs. To do this, the provider should, at a minimum, ensure:

a) personal plans set out children's current needs and how they will be met;

b) personal plans are regularly reviewed and updated in partnership with families.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS), which state that: 'My personal plan (sometimes referred to as a care plan) is right for me because it sets out how my needs will be met, as well as my wishes and choices.' (HSCS 1.15).

**This area for improvement was made on 4 June 2025.**

### Action taken since then

Personal plans contained relevant information including individualised strategies which had been regularly reviewed and updated by staff. We saw evidence here of staff developing these strategies in partnership with families, reviewing them appropriately and sharing them with staff for consistency of approach. We saw these strategies being shared effectively between staff and used with the children. This was having a positive outcome on children's wellbeing.

This area for improvement has been met.

## Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.scot.

## Detailed evaluations

| Leadership | 3 - Satisfactory / Adequate |
|---|---|
| Leadership and management of staff and resources | 3 - Satisfactory / Adequate |
| Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment | 4 - Good |

| Children thrive and develop in quality spaces | 4 - Good |
|---|---|
| Children experience high quality spaces | 4 - Good |

| Children play and learn | 4 - Good |
|---|---|
| Playing, learning and developing | 4 - Good |

| Children are supported to achieve | 4 - Good |
|---|---|
| Nurturing care and support | 4 - Good |

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