Arisaig Primary School Nursery
Day Care of Children

Arisaig Primary School
Arisaig
PH39 4NH

Telephone: 01687 450 282

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
10 September 2026

Service provided by:
Highland Council

Service provider number:
SP2003001693

Service no:
CS2003017167

About the service

Arisaig Primary School Nursery is registered to provide a day care of children service to a maximum of 18 children aged two years to those not yet attending primary school, of whom no more than four children are aged two to under three years of age. Four children were present at the time of the inspection.

The service is provided from a modern purpose-built premises adjacent to the grounds of Arisaig Primary School. There is a reception area, main playroom, toilets, kitchen facilities, a separate office and storage facilities. Entry to the premises was secure and children had access to an enclosed outside play area which surrounded the building.

The manager of this service is also the manager of Inverie Primary School Nursery CS2003013561.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 8 September 2026 between 09:00 and 16:30. This inspection was carried out by one inspector from the Care Inspectorate.

To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included previous inspection findings, registration and complaints information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered throughout the inspection year. To inform our evaluation we:

- spent time with children using the service,
- received completed questionnaires from parents and staff,
- spoke with staff and the manager,
- observed practice and daily life, 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 received warm, nurturing care from staff who knew them well and responded sensitively to their individual needs.
- Children experienced meaningful learning through play, community links and experiences that reflected their interests.
- The indoor and outdoor environments provided engaging opportunities for children to play, learn and develop independently.
- Further monitoring and self-evaluation was needed to effectively sustain improvements within nurturing care and support.
- Staffing arrangements promoted children's safety and wellbeing and children benefited from consistent, responsive support.

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

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

Quality indicator: Leadership and management of staff and resources

The service had continued to make progress in strengthening leadership arrangements since the previous inspection. Staff and leaders spoke positively about improvements that had been implemented and demonstrated a growing understanding of their role in supporting change. Support from the local authority early years team had contributed positively to developments within the setting. Improvements to the indoor environment had created a more welcoming and engaging space for children and were beginning to enhance the quality of play and learning experiences. The manager reported increased support through professional dialogue and local authority networks, while staff described feeling more confident in implementing new approaches and contributing to developments within the service.

Leaders and staff demonstrated a commitment to reflecting on practice and engaged with a range of national guidance and best practice resources to support development. This had contributed to some positive changes within the service, including improvements to the learning environment and approaches to planning. We discussed how greater use of the challenge questions within A quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors could further strengthen self-evaluation and improvement planning. In particular, this could support a more monitoring and evaluation of nurturing care and support, and help leaders identify areas where practice requires further development.

Quality assurance processes were becoming more established and were beginning to strengthen oversight of improvement activity. The introduction of a quality assurance calendar had improved the structure and consistency of monitoring arrangements, and staff had taken on responsibilities such as peer observations and quality assurance activities. This had helped to develop a greater sense of shared responsibility for improvement. While audits, reviews and monitoring activities were taking place regularly, they were not yet consistently identifying where practice had drifted from agreed expectations. For example, staff had reviewed best practice guidance relating to mealtimes and sleep arrangements, but monitoring had not identified that these approaches were not being applied consistently in practice. As a result, opportunities to promote children's safety, independence and wellbeing were missed. To support continued improvement in this area, we made an area for improvement (see area for improvement 1).

The vision, values and aims for the service provided a sense of direction for staff. These had not been reviewed recently and there was limited evidence of meaningful involvement from children and families in their development. As a result, they were not clearly influencing improvement priorities. There was scope to revisit these in partnership with children, families and staff to ensure they reflect the unique context of the setting and provide a foundation for future improvement.

Approaches to involving children and families in self-evaluation and service improvement were developing. Children's views were considered through daily interactions and floorbooks, and staff responded positively to their interests when planning experiences. Families were consulted through an annual survey, providing useful feedback about the service. There were missed opportunities to involve children and families more meaningfully in evaluating the quality of the service and identifying priorities for improvement. Strengthening participation in these processes could support children's rights, encourage greater ownership

of changes and help ensure future developments reflect the experiences and views of those using the service.

Quality indicator: Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

Staffing arrangements were effective in meeting children's care and support needs and were responsive to the individual needs of the children attending the setting. This contributed to children experiencing consistent care, supervision and support. Leaders had reviewed children's needs and made adjustments to both the environment and staff deployment to promote safety and quality experiences.

Changes to the outdoor area, including the installation of fencing and a gate, alongside the use of an alternative access point, enabled staff to supervise outdoor play effectively. As a result, children were able to move between environments safely while benefiting from increased opportunities for independent play and exploration. The improved indoor environment also had a positive impact on staff deployment. The provision of more engaging and stimulating resources resulted in children becoming increasingly absorbed in play, reducing the need for frequent adult direction and allowing staff to focus on extending learning, responding to individual needs and providing responsive support.

Staff communicated effectively to ensure children remained well supported across the setting. The introduction of walkie-talkies was helping them coordinate movement between spaces and this supported continuity in children's experiences. Procedures for intimate care were well understood and organised in a way that maintained appropriate supervision for all children while ensuring access to both indoor and outdoor learning opportunities.

Staff had been supported to visit other settings as part of their professional development and this had informed some changes to practice which benefited outcomes for children. They had undertaken a range of training and had had opportunities to reflect on it. Opportunities remained to strengthen reflective practice further, by evaluating how professional learning had influenced practice, improved outcomes for children and aligned with best practice guidance.

Areas for improvement

1. To support consistently high-quality outcomes for children, the service should strengthen leadership and quality assurance arrangements to ensure leaders can effectively evaluate all aspects of service provision and use this information to drive continuous and sustainable improvement.

This should include, but is not limited to: a) implementing robust quality assurance processes that effectively monitor practice, evaluate impact on children's outcomes, and support consistency across the service; and b) establishing a cycle of self-evaluation that involves staff, children and families in identifying strengths, areas for development and meaningful actions for improvement

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).

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.

The environment was welcoming, well organised and thoughtfully designed to support children's play, learning and independence. Ample space between resources enabled children to move freely and safely throughout the playroom, promoting their confidence and autonomy. A broad range of experiences was available, providing children with meaningful opportunities to explore, create, investigate and develop new skills across different areas of learning.

The home corner offered a rich and familiar environment for imaginative play. A combination of dressing-up resources, a play kitchen and a blend of real, natural and play materials encouraged children to develop their creativity, communication and social skills. Real household items, plants and soft furnishings created a homely atmosphere that supported children's sense of belonging and led to meaningful role-play experiences.

Children benefited from an inviting reading area, with comfortable seating, soft furnishings and an attractive selection of books. Resources were stored at children's level throughout the playroom, enabling children to make choices independently and access materials with ease. A well-resourced writing and drawing area supported spontaneous mark making and early writing, while experiences such as weighing and loose parts play helped develop children's mathematical thinking in meaningful contexts.

A range of sensory and exploratory experiences further enriched children's learning. Water play, natural materials, construction resources, puzzles and musical instruments encouraged curiosity, problem solving and investigation. The availability of loose parts and natural resources supported open-ended play and creativity. The music provision offered opportunities for self-expression and enjoyment; however, consideration should be given to how frequently children access these resources independently and whether they are sufficiently responsive to children's interests and preferences.

Outdoor play continued to provide valuable opportunities for children to be active and develop their physical skills. Improvements to the outdoor environment, including the installation of fencing, had enhanced children's access to outdoor experiences while maintaining appropriate supervision. Children were observed confidently using balance bikes and trikes, demonstrating growing coordination, confidence and physical competence. Appropriate risk assessments supported safe access to outdoor play and reflected the environment effectively.

Children's health and wellbeing were promoted through established hygiene routines. Children routinely washed their hands before and after meals, and most did so independently following outdoor play, with younger children appropriately supported when needed. These practices helped minimise the risk of infection and encouraged the development of positive lifelong hygiene habits.

Improvements to nappy changing arrangements reflected best practice guidance and had enhanced the quality of care provided. The changing area had been relocated to a designated cubicle within the children's toilet area and offered appropriate ventilation, lighting and temperature control. The space was clean, uncluttered and easy to maintain, with suitable PPE and disposal facilities available. As a result, children experienced personal care that was safe, hygienic and respectful of their dignity.

Children were further protected through secure entry arrangements and garden gates that restricted unauthorised access to the service. We asked the provider to ensure that appropriate registration with the Information Commissioner Office (ICO) is in place for the CCTV system, providing assurance that personal data is managed in line with GDPR requirements.

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 were happy, engaged and confident in their play. They benefited from warm, positive relationships with staff, who knew them well and responded sensitively to their interests, ideas and cues. Children led their own play and learning for large parts of the day and could choose whether to participate in experiences such as baking and gardening. This supported their independence, confidence and enjoyment while ensuring learning remained meaningful and relevant to their interests.

Staff recognised the importance of following children's interests and provided opportunities for children to influence learning experiences through play and everyday interactions. Children benefited from a range of experiences that promoted their learning and development across different areas. Outdoors, they confidently used bikes and trikes, developing coordination, balance and physical skills. Indoors, children explored sensory resources, imaginative play opportunities, the sand tray and mark-making experiences, supporting creativity, communication and early literacy development. A den area encouraged collaboration, exploration and imaginative thinking.

During a baking activity, staff used warm and encouraging interactions to support children's participation and independence. Children followed a recipe, weighed ingredients and took turns, developing early numeracy skills through counting, measuring and recognising quantity. The activity also supported communication, cooperation and problem-solving skills. Community-based learning opportunities further enriched children's experiences. For example, children visited a local polytunnel to prepare soil for planting, helping them develop practical skills and learn about the natural world.

Children's views were valued and helped shape aspects of planning through discussions, floor books and everyday interactions. Staff had worked hard to strengthen planning and assessment processes, with floor books adapted to capture both child-led and adult-guided experiences. This demonstrated a growing commitment to children's participation and ownership of learning. There was scope to develop this further by ensuring that intentional planning was less adult led, while providing meaningful opportunities to observe, assess and extend children's learning Strengthening this approach could support children to play a more active role in shaping their learning experiences and help ensure learning remains responsive to their interests, needs and stage of development.

Processes for assessing and monitoring progress were developing. Observations, learning journals and developmental overviews helped staff to share children's achievements with families and monitor progress across curriculum areas. Planning for younger children reflected their age and stage of development appropriately. While observations identified learning effectively, next steps were not consistently focused on developing skills or learning. Strengthening this could support more purposeful planning and help ensure learning builds progressively on children's strengths, interests and individual needs.

The service made effective use of the wider community to enrich children's learning. Regular visits within the local area, including trips linked to children's interests, broadened children's experiences and helped them make connections between their learning and the world around them. Parents agreed that use of the community was a strength of the service. One parent said, " Our daughter... absolutely loves going on the walks and learning about all the planting and growing in the poly tunnel." Community events and fundraising activities provided additional opportunities for children to develop social skills, build relationships and strengthen their sense of belonging.

The staff team demonstrated a good understanding of the value of outdoor learning and had appropriately identified this as an area for further development. One member of the team told us, " Our natural environment has been an excellent learning resource. We have been able to resource care, play and learning through fundraising, this has led to the children being more confident in the wider community." We agreed that continuing to develop this aspect of the service could provide children with even greater opportunities to investigate, solve problems, take managed risks and lead their own learning through rich, meaningful outdoor experiences.

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.

Children experienced warm, nurturing care from staff who knew them and their families well. Positive and trusting relationships helped children feel safe, secure and valued within the setting. Staff responded sensitively to individual needs and changing circumstances, adapting their approach to promote children's wellbeing and comfort. For example, staff recognised when a child was becoming tired and adjusted routines accordingly. Their understanding of children's developmental needs and wider family circumstances enabled them to provide responsive and personalised support. Parents told us that their children received high-quality care, with one parent saying, "My child loves attending nursery, they are always excited for the days they go, and this is down to the excellent staff who provide such a warm and friendly environment."

Strong partnerships with families supported continuity of care and contributed positively to children's wellbeing. Staff valued daily arrivals and departures as important opportunities to share information and respond to emerging needs. Families were welcomed into the entrance and cloakroom area, where meaningful exchanges helped maintain consistency between home and the setting. Transition arrangements were flexible and tailored to individual circumstances, helping children settle successfully into the service. Effective communication with receiving settings, including the local Gaelic medium provision, further supported continuity and positive transitions as children moved on from the nursery.

Children's wellbeing was central to daily practice. Staff used their observations and knowledge of children effectively to inform decisions, adapt routines and respond to changing needs. Planning and review processes involved families and helped ensure care and support remained relevant, responsive and focused on achieving positive outcomes for children. This helped ensure children experienced care that was responsive to their changing needs and circumstances.

Mealtimes were calm, relaxed and sociable experiences where children enjoyed nutritious meals and snacks. Children were supported to develop independence through activities such as preparing their place setting and spreading butter on crackers. Effective hygiene routines were well established, and children demonstrated confidence and familiarity with these practices. When staff were seated with children, interactions were warm and meaningful, supporting children's sense of belonging and enjoyment. At times, staff were not consistently able to remain seated with children throughout meals as they served food on to plates. This reduced opportunities for continuous supervision and modelling positive mealtimes. There were missed opportunities to involve children more fully in preparation and serving of meals. We made an area for improvement to review and monitor mealtime arrangements in line with best practice guidance (see Area for Improvement 1).

Children benefited from well-maintained personal plans that provided staff with clear guidance to meet their individual needs and promote their health, safety and wellbeing. Arrangements relating to medication,

personal care, communication support and additional support needs were comprehensive and well managed. There was scope to strengthen some personal plans further by including information about sleep routines for younger children and those who continued to nap, supporting greater consistency between home and the setting.

Detailed risk assessments and individual support strategies supported staff to meet children's needs safely and consistently, contributing positively to their wellbeing. Effective partnerships with health professionals contributed to a holistic approach to supporting children's wellbeing. This helped ensure children received coordinated and consistent support. Safeguarding arrangements were robust. Staff had a clear understanding of child protection procedures and had recently refreshed their knowledge through training.

Staff worked collaboratively with families and partner agencies to plan and review children's care and support. Families were encouraged to contribute to care planning, and communication with external professionals was effective. One member of staff told us, "Parents/carers are given the opportunity to come in once a term to look through their child's work and amend any information in their personal file. Parent/carers are welcome in as often as possible if their child is working through issues and need more support." The service recognised that there were opportunities to strengthen family engagement beyond personal plan reviews, and was taking steps to develop this area of practice.

Areas for improvement

1. To support children's health, safety and wellbeing, the provider, manager and staff should continue to monitor and review the snack and mealtime experiences.

This should include, but is not limited to: a) reviewing staff practice to ensure children are effectively supervised whilst eating; b) promoting opportunities for developing children's independence and language skills; and c) involving children in the preparation and delivery of snack.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:'I can enjoy unhurried snack and mealtimes in as relaxed an atmosphere as possible.' (HSCS 1.35)

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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