St. Brides Primary School Nursery
Day Care of Children

Onich
Fort William
PH33 6SA

Telephone: 01855 821 280

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
27 August 2026

Service provided by:
Highland Council

Service provider number:
SP2003001693

Service no:
CS2007149305

About the service

St Brides Primary School Nursery Primary Nursery is situated in the village of Onich, within the Lochaber area of the Highlands. The nursery is located in a converted classroom space within the building of St Brides Primary School. Accommodation comprises of a cloakroom, bright playroom, toilet facilities, and a large outdoor area. The nursery also has access to a large green space behind the school.

The service is provided by Highland Council and managed by the primary school head teacher. It is registered to provide a day care of children's service to a maximum of 18 children aged from three years to those not yet attending primary school.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 26 and 27 August 2026. The inspection was carried out by one inspector from the Care Inspectorate.

To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about the service. This included previous inspection findings, registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

In making our evaluations of the service we:
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents
- spoke with the children using the service
- spoke with two members of senior management and three staff members
- received and reviewed five questionnaire responses from family members and three from staff members
- spoke with three family members
- assessed core assurances, including the physical environment.

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.

Key messages

Positive relationships between children and staff fostered a caring and inclusive ethos.
Leadership was a key strength of the service and had a positive impact on outcomes for children, families and staff.
High-quality interactions and play and learning experiences had a positive impact on children's confidence, and overall wellbeing and development.
Staff had a strong understanding of the service's strengths and development needs.
Leaders managed change effectively, helping to ensure improvements were sustained and embedded in practice.
Staff and families had developed strong and trusting relationships.
Leaders and staff placed high-quality play and learning at the centre of improvement planning and service development.

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	5 - Very Good
Children play and learn	5 - Very Good
Children are supported to achieve	5 - Very Good

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

Leadership 5 - Very Good

Quality indicator: Leadership and management of staff and resources.

We found major strengths in this aspect of the setting's work and identified very few areas for improvement, therefore we evaluated this quality indicator as very good.

Leadership was a key strength of the service. Despite being relatively new to their roles, senior management provided effective and visible leadership that positively influenced outcomes for children, families and staff. They demonstrated commitment, confidence and clear direction, which supported the continued development of the service. Staff morale was high, and staff described leaders as supportive and approachable. They valued the encouragement, trust and guidance they received, which promoted motivation, commitment and a positive working ethos. Leaders successfully empowered staff to take ownership of areas of practice and contribute to service improvement. As a result, staff felt respected, valued and confident to implement positive and informed change.

A shared and clear vision for the service was firmly rooted in providing high-quality experiences and outcomes for children and families. The vision, values and aims were embedded in daily practice and were evident in interactions, decision-making and the experiences provided for children. The nurturing ethos of the setting was consistently promoted which created a welcoming and inclusive environment.

A culture of continuous improvement was embedded across the service and effectively supported the success and achievement of all children. Staff demonstrated a clear understanding of the setting's strengths and development needs and implemented realistic, achievable improvement plans to enhance outcomes. The Quality Improvement Plan was presented in a family-friendly format that was accessible and enabled families to engage meaningfully with the service's improvement journey. Leaders managed the pace of change effectively, which resulted in improvements being sustained and embedded in practice. It was evident that high-quality play and learning were central to the service's practice.

A strong team ethos enabled staff to work collaboratively, support one another and respond flexibly to the needs of the service. They regularly reflected on their practice, undertook self-directed professional learning and shared knowledge effectively across the team. This contributed to a skilled workforce committed to improving outcomes for children and families. There were some opportunities to further evidence quality assurance and self-evaluation activities through existing documentation, however, this was proportionate to the stage of development of recently introduced systems. The small staff team had established strong foundations and demonstrated a clear commitment to further embedding their approaches over time.

Children's views were valued and influenced service development, for example through the design of the nursery garden. Leaders had identified strengthening family engagement and involvement as an improvement priority. This told us they respected families' views and were committed to ensuring families influenced the ongoing development of the service. A parent told us, 'Yes, I feel that both my child and I are given opportunities to be involved in developing the nursery in a meaningful way. A lovely example was the sponsored walk to help raise funds for a new mud kitchen. It was a great way for the children and families to be involved and contribute towards something that the children would then be able to enjoy and benefit from'.

Children play and learn 5 - Very Good

Quality indicator: Playing learning and developing

We found major strengths in this aspect of the setting's work and identified very few areas for improvement, therefore we evaluated this quality indicator as very good.

Children experienced high-quality play and learning that was meaningful, provided challenge, and led by their interests. This was enriched by a staff team who demonstrated a strong understanding of the value of play. They skilfully promoted children's thinking and creativity through skilled interactions, effective questioning and sensitive support. They judged when to observe, when to stand back and when to intervene. This meant children lead their own play, shared ideas and developed positive relationships with peers and staff. As a result, children were independent and fully engaged in meaningful learning experiences that promoted imagination, challenge and the development of life skills.

The indoor environment was inspiring and thoughtfully resourced with an extensive range of real-life, open-ended and natural resources. Children independently selected resources which fostered their creativity, curiosity and decision-making skills. Personal touches, including family photographs, and items from home helped children feel a strong sense of belonging within the setting. We asked staff to consider how they could enhance the décor to make the playroom feel cosier and warmer for children.

The outdoor environment provided valuable opportunities for active play, exploration and learning. Staff actively involved children in developing the nursery garden, resulting in a space that reflected their interests, experiences and local area. For example, children played together in a small rowing boat. They told us, 'We are at sea, we use the oar to move the boat' and 'If we see a shark, it will be a Basking shark'. Other children were busy collecting sticks, stones and shells and created an imaginary fire to toast marshmallows. These experiences strengthened children's sense of belonging and connections to their local and wider communities. A parent told us, 'I also really value that outdoor play goes beyond the nursery garden, with regular trips to the beach, forest and local playground'.

Floor books were of a high quality and demonstrated how children's interests informed both responsive and intentional planning. Children led their learning and staff clearly documented how experiences developed from children's ideas and curiosities. There was scope to capture more of children's comments and ideas and to further strengthen how learning was deepened, revisited and consolidated. Overall, tracking systems provided staff with a clear overview of children's progress and supported them to identify and address any gaps in learning. This contributed to the positive outcomes for children.
Children's learning and development were supported by high-quality observations which focused on individual progress and achievements. Staff knew children well and used observations effectively to identify interests and next steps in learning. This meant activities and experiences remained responsive to children's needs and supported their progress. With support from the local authority, staff had identified opportunities to strengthen approaches to tracking and monitoring children's next steps. We agreed this would help support assessment information, ensuring it remained manageable and linked to planning. This would further support children to reach their full potential.

Children are supported to achieve 5 - Very Good

Quality indicator: Nurturing care and support.

We found major strengths in this aspect of the setting's work and identified very few areas for improvement, therefore we evaluated this quality indicator as very good.

Children benefited from warm, nurturing and responsive interactions from staff, who were consistently calm and caring. This approach helped children feel safe, secure and included.

Staff acted as positive role models and had embedded respectful, rights-based practice. This meant children confidently expressed their needs, wishes and preferences, and demonstrated a strong sense of belonging. Children mirrored the respectful behaviours demonstrated by staff, which contributed to the caring and inclusive ethos. Staff responded sensitively and effectively to minor disagreements, which supported children's emotional wellbeing and sense of security.

Personal plans contained meaningful information which enabled staff to provide individualised care and support. Staff knew children and families well and used this knowledge effectively to meet children's changing needs. We highlighted personal planning documentation could be streamlined by removing information that was not required, helping to ensure plans remained relevant, meaningful and focused on individual children's needs.

Relationships were a significant strength of the service. Staff had developed strong, and trusting partnerships with children and families. They understood the importance of nurturing relationships in supporting children's growth and development. This resulted in children who appeared happy, confident and were thriving within the setting. Families told us, 'St. Brides nursery is wonderful. We are very grateful to the team there and feel blessed to have them apart of our children's lives!', 'What I love most about attending nursery is how well the staff know my child as an individual and how genuinely caring they are towards them', and 'The staff are always caring, approachable and professional, and I feel very reassured knowing that my child is in such supportive and capable hands'.
Transitions were managed very well. Children and families received a warm welcome and children moved confidently between home and nursery routines. Effective communication and positive relationships supported continuity in children's care and learning. Leaders had also identified ways to further strengthen transitions into the school and other local primary schools. This demonstrated a commitment to ensuring positive outcomes for all children.
Children enjoyed nutritious and well-balanced meals and snacks, with fresh drinking water available throughout the day. Snack times was a positive experience, with children involved in planning snack choices, preparing food and serving themselves. These opportunities promoted independence, responsibility and confidence. Staff sat alongside children and engaged them in meaningful conversations, creating a relaxed and sociable experience that supported children's social and communication skills. We suggested ways to ensure the lunchtime experience reflected the same high-quality practice observed at snack time. Staff responded positively to this feedback and implemented changes, resulting in an improved lunchtime experience by our second visit.
Staff were knowledgeable about their child protection responsibilities and safeguarding procedures which helped keep children safe and secure. Medication procedures reflected current guidance, and we were confident medication would be stored and administered safely. Children's privacy and dignity was respected during personal care routines, staff promoted children's independence while providing appropriate support. As a result, children experienced care that was nurturing, respectful and responsive to their needs.

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	5 - Very Good
Leadership and management of staff and resources	5 - Very Good

Children play and learn	5 - Very Good
Playing, learning and developing	5 - Very Good

Children are supported to achieve	5 - Very Good
Nurturing care and support	5 - Very Good

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