Early learning and childcare setting shared inspection report

Kirkstyle Early Learning and Childcare

South Lanarkshire Council
24 March 2026

In January 2026, a team of inspectors from HMIE and the Care Inspectorate visited Kirkstyle Early Learning and Childcare. During our visit, we talked to parents/carers and children and worked closely with the head of integrated unit and staff.

Key inspection findings:

- Children were cared for by a dedicated staff team who worked well together to provide a caring and nurturing environment for children. They were eager to further develop their knowledge and skills to help to improve outcomes for children.
- Staff had built, warm, positive, and nurturing relationships with children and families.
- Senior leaders should review daily routines and the flow of the day to ensure these have a positive impact on children's overall early learning and childcare experience.
- The range of experiences within the establishment and the community are supporting children to learn across the curriculum and become active members of their community.
- Senior leaders and staff should develop further planning for children's learning to support an improved balance of uninterrupted play, child-initiated and adult-initiated learning. Senior leaders and staff should use all of the information about children's learning to demonstrate clearly, each child's progress over time.

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HM Inspectors and the Care Inspectorate gathered evidence to enable us to evaluate the setting's work using four quality indicators from the Quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors.

Quality Indicator	Evaluation
Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment	very good
Learning, teaching and assessment	good
Nurturing, care and support	good
Children's progress	good

Summary of inspection findings in the park

Key contextual Information

Kirkstyle Early Learning and Childcare is an establishment with enhanced provision in Carluke, South Lanarkshire. The establishment provides early learning and childcare (ELC) places for 126 children at any one time. As part of the additional support needs (ASN) provision, 20 term-time places are allocated via the South Lanarkshire Council ASN admissions panel. All children can attend from the age of two until they begin primary school. The current roll is 122. All children in the enhanced provision have a range and complexity of ASN including health care, communication, and developmental needs. Across the establishment, a further 27% of children have additional support needs. The nursery is open from 8 am until 6 pm, 52 weeks of the year. Children attending the ASN provision attend from across the local authority. Almost all are transported to nursery with local authority transportation and attend on a term-time basis.

The nursery was purpose built in 2020. The building comprises of five playrooms. Three of these playrooms are for children aged 3-5, one of which is for children with additional support needs. There is a large outdoor space which has been split into three specific areas for different playrooms.

Staffing consists of a head of integrated unit who has overall responsibility for the whole establishment. There are three part-time depute managers, equivalent of two full time posts. One depute has operational responsibility for the enhanced provision, two team leaders, 22 early years practitioners, a parent and child support worker, four early years support workers and three support staff including administrative personnel.

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Leadership:
Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

Children benefited from a motivated and responsive staff team who took time to get to know individual children and families. This helped staff develop trusting relationships with parents, helping them feel confident and comfortable leaving their children in the setting.

Staff valued opportunities for continuous professional development. They regularly participated in learning to enhance their knowledge and skills. Training was well planned, taking account of staff interests, skills and best practice guidance. As a result, the team were knowledgeable about supporting children's care and development.

The staff team worked well together and strived to create a happy, nurturing environment for children and families. They communicated well, sharing information to help ensure children received consistent care.

Staff valued opportunities to meet with managers to discuss their role, identify training needs and seek support. Annual review meetings provided meaningful time to reflect on strengths and plan further development. This helped staff to feel valued and confident in their role.

Newer staff were welcomed warmly into the team. Effective mentoring and inductions processes supported them to settle into their role. Leaders supported all staff through regular playroom observations and worked alongside them to identify strengths and where improvements were needed.

The team were proud of their achievements and reflected well together as they embedded learning into practice. They welcomed opportunities to share best practice within their own setting and with colleagues across other settings.

Staff were enthusiastic about their individual champion roles. They valued time to participate in specific training for their role. For example, Forest schools, outdoor learning, family engagement, literacy and children's rights. Staff should continue to be supported to further develop these roles as planned.

Children attended the setting at varied times throughout the week. Staff worked hard to ensure continuity of care despite these differing attendance patterns. Leaders carefully considered children's routines and individual needs when planning staff deployment, ensuring children were cared for by familiar adults who knew them well.

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Children play and learn: Learning, teaching and assessment

Children aged two to three (Pioneers)

Staff create a respectful, welcoming environment where children have access to quality resources both indoors and outdoors. Staff interactions with children promote communication and language development well. They respond positively to children extending their vocabulary through stories, rhyme time and experiences such as sensory play.

Staff plan appropriately for children's learning. They track children's developmental milestones regularly using local authority guidance and create relevant learning targets that are recorded within individual learning journeys. Building on this, senior leaders and staff should now consider ways to streamline intentional planning. They should look at how to use observations more effectively as a starting point to develop children's interests that they observe during play.

Children Aged Three to Five (Adventurers)

Staff provide a stimulating environment both indoors and outdoors. The indoor environment is inviting with quality resources promoting play and learning across the curriculum. Most staff are skilled at responding to children's ideas and extending their interests. Staff use the community well to provide a good range of learning opportunities. These include trips to the forest where children develop skills such as teamwork, problem solving and safety awareness. Staff observe a clear change in children's independence and confidence during these sessions, with increased positive attitudes. Staff are keen to work towards offering this opportunity daily.

Effective support from staff enables children to manage their emotions well. They encourage children to talk through conflicts and problems with their peers. Children have positive friendships, showing caring and kindness to one another. They are joyful in their play. A few children could benefit from more outdoor physical play to help them regulate their energy indoors to benefit their focus and attention skills.

Staff use technology available effectively to support learning and teaching. They use interactive boards meaningfully to support children to learn about the day's weather. A few children use programmable toys, skilfully. They use the digital camera to take photos and print them instantly. Staff could build on this further, to support children to record their own learning in more depth.

All children have 'my learning journey books' that record their progress and achievements. Most staff use these well to capture children's significant learning. Senior leaders monitor learning journeys and advise practitioners where they need to reflect and develop their skills further. With staff, senior leaders should now consider how documentation such as floorbooks could involve children and their family more

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effectively. Senior leaders should develop moderation processes further to create consistent approaches to assessing children's progress. This should develop further the team's confidence.

Staff plan adult-led experiences that demonstrate children's learning in all areas of the curriculum. Children's interests could be extended further and used increasingly to influence the planning process. Staff should streamline intentional planning to develop responsive approaches further. This could create more effective engagement, pace and challenge to ensure greater depth to children's learning. Staff have appropriate planning processes in place to support children who may need additional support with their learning. They review individual plans regularly involving parents and support agencies.

Provision for children with additional support needs (Explorers and Trailblazers)

Most children engage in play experiences for appropriate periods of time in line with their developmental stage. They are motivated by planned and spontaneous play both indoors and outdoors. Most children are curious to explore play resources confidently, make choices, and sustain engagement. A few children require targeted support to increase their tolerance and purposeful engagement.

Staff interactions reflect very well the values of the nursery. They show a clear emphasis on children's rights and dignity in their interactions which are consistently sensitive, responsive, and respectful. Staff know children very well, including their preferences, and use this knowledge effectively to meet individual needs. As a result, almost all children settle well and engage positively with their key workers and other staff.

All children have individual care and support plans. These detailed plans outline barriers and agreed strategies to support children's learning and development. Staff use identified strategies increasingly well to help children settle, regulate their emotions, and re-engage with experiences. There is a clear focus on communication, attention, sensory development and physical skills. Children's interactions with staff show that they feel secure, content, and happy within the nursery environment. Staff work very well with allied health partners to plan for each child's learning and development.

Senior leaders and staff use a range of tracking tools to monitor children's progress. They meet regularly to discuss children's development. Senior leaders should continue strengthening consistency in how staff track and monitor progress across all areas of children's development. They should consider how to capture levels of support, engagement and small steps children take as they build communication, sensory, physical, life and independence skills. This will help staff evidence children's progress more clearly over time.

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Children are supported to achieve: Nurturing care and support

Children were settled, happy and confident in the setting. They received caring and responsive interactions from staff, which supported the development of secure, positive attachments and promoted emotional wellbeing.

Staff took time to get to know children and gathered meaningful information which was recorded in individual personal plans. Families were regularly involved in discussing their child's progress and helping to make decisions about their care and support. We discussed where some children's targets could be strengthened by adding clearer detail to ensure strategies for supporting progress are clear.

Staff worked closely with a range of external agencies, including speech and language therapist, educational psychology, and occupational therapy. This helped ensure staff were knowledgeable about how to support children. Observations and records of children's development supported staff when planning transitions for children moving onto other establishments.

Children moved freely between a variety of play spaces, including outdoor areas, which promoted their wellbeing. Play spaces were well resourced, which supported children to play with friends, in small groups or on their own if they wished. Children had fun chatting with friends at the drawing table and playing in the home area.

We discussed where further consideration could be given to reviewing daily routines and the overall flow of the day, as this varied across the setting. For some children routines were different to accommodate tidying up, adult-led group times and transitioning to lunch. This meant they had less time to play which limited their choices. Moving forward, daily routines should be reviewed to help ensure consistency for all children. (See area for improvement 1).

Mealtimes were relaxed and sociable, staff sat alongside children which supported opportunities for conversation. Children were encouraged to prepare snacks and self-serve meals, promoting independence and life skills. They also enjoyed outdoor cooking experiences. Due to individual patterns of attendance, children were offered different options for snack. This was confusing for some children. The provider should review snack menus to ensure consistency, while maintaining a focus on healthy choices.

The staff and manager had worked hard to improve connections with families across the setting. As a result, families felt communication was positive and they valued opportunities to participate in stay and play sessions and other events. The provision of a parent room provided a comfortable and welcoming space for informal discussions and meetings. Parents appreciated opportunities to discuss their child's progress with staff. An online app and information boards helped keep families informed about nursery events. Moving forward, leaders should consider additional

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ways to welcome families at the beginning and end of the day. This would help further enhance positive relationships.

Areas for improvement

To support children's wellbeing and development, the provider should review daily routines and the flow of the day to help reduce time gathering together for adult-led routines.
This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standard (HSCS) which state: 'I experience high quality care and support based on relevant evidence, guidance and best practice' (HSCS 4.11)

Children are supported to achieve: Children's progress

Children aged 2-3 years (Pioneers)

Children have joined the playroom over recent months. They continue to make positive progress in their learning and development since starting nursery. Children are showing skills in independence as they explore the playroom and make good attempts at getting themselves ready for outdoors. They communicate with adults through gestures, vocalisation and vocabulary according to their stage of development. Children enjoy opportunities to develop their skills outdoors such as climbing, curiosity and investigation.

Children aged 3-5 yrs (Adventurers)

As a result of the range of children's experiences and the quality of staff interactions, most children continue to make good progress in their learning and development. Most children are becoming confident, independent and resilient as a result of the range of experiences indoors, outdoors and within the community.

Most children develop their gross motor skills well when engaging in energetic play outdoors. During forest visits, children navigate different terrain confidently and scale the mud hill skilfully using their problem-solving skills. Staff should now consider ways to increase opportunities for children to talk about their emotions and wellbeing. All children find their own way to communicate their needs with their peers and adults and are included fully in all nursery experiences. The majority of children communicate and engage confidently in conversation with their peers and adults. They recall and share experiences, ideas and participate positively in nursery committees. Children are becoming aware of writing for a purpose when taking committee minutes and writing shopping lists. In early numeracy and mathematics, children develop their counting skills well through play. They use relevant mathematical language, including directional language in the correct context. As

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identified, a stronger and consistent focus on literacy and numeracy should support all children to make improved progress in these areas.

The current tracker recording children's progress over time does not provide an accurate picture of children's learning. However, observations of children, talking with staff, recorded learning conversations and individual learning journeys demonstrate that children have made good progress since starting nursery. Senior leaders should use all information about children's learning to provide an overview of the progress they make as a result of their nursery experience. This should include staff professional judgement.

Staff recognise and celebrate children's successes meaningfully. They are at the early stages of celebrating achievements from outwith the nursery. Staff provide a range of worthwhile opportunities for children to develop skills for life and learning and to become active members of their community. This includes intergenerational experiences, participating in local events and a focus on sustainability and looking after the environment.

Senior leaders and staff know children and families very well. They understand where potential barriers to inclusion and learning may exist and support children in a timely manner. Staff work collaboratively with the parent and family support worker and other partner agencies to minimise barriers to learning and inclusion. This positive work is helping to secure improved outcomes for children and families. Senior leaders monitor children's attendance and provide support when needed. Overall, most children's attendance at nursery is very good.

Provision for children with additional support needs (Explorers and Trailblazers)

Overall, most children make good progress from their individual starting points.

Almost all children achieve expected targets set within learning journals and core plans. A few children are capable of achieving more in their communication and interaction skills. Staff should provide further support to help children make the best possible progress. In particular children should be supported to develop their social communication skills. Staff should continue to develop their use of total communication approaches to ensure all children develop their communication as best they can.

Effective documentation such as learning journals and daily diaries provide meaningful opportunities for staff and families to reflect on children's learning and celebrate personal successes. These approaches help staff build a more holistic picture of each child's progress.

Senior leaders and staff have a strong understanding of children's additional support needs and their wider socio-economic circumstances. This knowledge helps ensure equity of access and prevents any child missing out due to their individual needs. Staff

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encourage parents to share children's achievements from home, which is increasingly reflected in learning journals and supports a fuller picture of each child's progress.

Overall, children's attendance in the unit is very good. Continued review of children with lower attendance will ensure that strategies in place lead to improved participation. This will support children further to sustain progress in their learning, achievements and development of key skills.

Safeguarding (HMIE)

Inspectors discussed safeguarding and child protection information provided by the ELC setting with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the ELC setting and the education authority.

Outcome of inspection

We are confident that the ELC setting has the capacity to continue to improve and so we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection.

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HM Inspector

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