St Mark's Primary Nursery Class
Day Care of Children

St. Marks Primary School
Sherry Drive
Hamilton
ML3 8XF

Telephone: 01698 283727

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
8 January 2025

Service provided by:
South Lanarkshire Council

Service provider number:
SP2003003481

Service no:
CS2022000259

About the service

St Mark's Primary Nursery Class is a daycare of children service provided by South Lanarkshire Council and located in the Little Earnock area of Hamilton. It is close to public transport links and local amenities.

The service is registered to provide care to a maximum of 40 children aged from three years to those not yet attending primary school.

The service is provided from the nursery wing of St Mark's Primary School. The playroom has direct access to a secure outdoor play area, which children can independently access throughout their day. Children also make use of facilities within the school, including the gym hall, library, dining hall and sensory room, to extend their play and learning opportunities.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 7 January 2025 between 08:40 and 16:25. We concluded the inspection on 8 January 2025 when we also gave inspection feedback to the management team and a representative of the service provider. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors.

To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included registration information, information submitted by the service, and intelligence gathered throughout the inspection year.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with some of the children and reviewed survey responses from 14 parents
- spoke with the management team and members of staff
- reviewed survey responses from five staff
- reviewed feedback from three visiting professionals from external agencies
- observed practice and staff interactions with children
- reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Children received nurturing support from compassionate staff who knew their individual personalities and needs very well. This contributed to children feeling safe, listened to and loved.
- Children were supported to reach their full potential as the setting had strong links with other agencies for specialist support, such as educational psychology and visiting teachers.
- Children experienced high quality facilities that supported their play, learning and development.
- Children and families benefitted from a service committed to continuous improvement.
- Staff felt very supported and valued by the management team and each other. This had contributed to a strong team ethos.

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

How good is our care, play and learning?	5 - Very Good
How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good

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

How good is our care, play and learning? 5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore, we evaluated this key question as very good.

Quality Indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support
Children were encouraged to form positive relationships within the setting, by staff whose own interactions were warm, caring and nurturing. Staff knew children's unique personalities and preferences and planned their care and support in collaboration with parents. Home visits by staff prior to children joining the setting contributed to this process and were a strength of the setting. The visits helped staff understand children's culture and individual needs. They could then use this knowledge to help children settle into the setting, which contributed to children feeling respected, included and loved.

Each child had a personal plan in place to support staff meet their needs and keep them safe and protected. The setting had developed strong links with other agencies for specialist support, such as educational psychologists and visiting teachers, to support staff plan on how best to help children reach their full potential. Staff were familiar with agreed strategies and sensitively implemented these, for example, to support a children's communication. We received feedback from three professionals working with the setting, who gave examples of training they had delivered to staff to support them in their role and ensure there was consistency in strategies used with children. Their comments included, "The nursery staff are excellent. Their kind, caring natures shine through when I am in the nursery. They are great at accommodating the additional needs of a variety of children in the setting. The communication with outside agencies and families is consistently of a high standard. The use of the resources they have is creative and innovative and I am always impressed by their use of the different spaces they have available."

We observed children's care routines, that respected their choices and stage of development. Staff offered children assistance in self-help tasks whilst encouraging their independence. For example, lunchtime was a lovely experience for children where they were involved in self serving of meals to promote their responsibility and life skills. Groups of children took it in turn to set the tables with tablecloths, real cutlery and attractive tableware to create a homely atmosphere. There was lots of mealtime chat as staff encouraged children's social skills and healthy eating habits.

We reviewed the setting's medication procedures and noted that medication was stored securely and out of reach of children. Documents were accurate and reflected children's individual health needs and requirements. Auditing of medication to support children's health and safety was in place. We discussed how this could be streamlined to ensure information is current while also maintaining positive outcomes for children.

Children's safety and wellbeing was ensured by clear child protection procedures that were well understood by staff. We reminded the management team about updates to the service provider's child protection guidelines, and these were added to procedures during our visit. This meant the service would be well prepared to address any concerns they had for children's welfare. Staff were familiar with the Care Inspectorate's safety campaign, 'Keeping Children Safe - Look, Think, Act' (SIMOA)' which helps keep children safe by raising awareness of how, and why, they could leave a childcare setting without a responsible adult. Staff creatively used the SIMOA elephant and other materials with children, so that they were learning about personal safety.

Quality Indicator 1.3: Play and learning
There was a very good balance of spontaneous and planned activities that were in keeping with children's interests and curiosities. They could access a variety of toys and natural materials that were appropriate for their abilities while also offering challenge, both indoors and outdoors. As a result, children were very engaged in play of their choice, as they explored, experimented and developed problem solving skills. Children were proud to share some of the activities they enjoyed with us, such as explaining their emotions through a smiley face they had drawn, "We're making pictures, this is mine."

Planning approaches were responsive and child-centred. Playroom areas were divided by curricular themes, such as health and wellbeing, literacy, creativity, numeracy, and science and technology. Staff rotated around these areas on a weekly basis, planning theme based activities and building on their observations of child initiated play to support and extend children's learning. Rotating staff in this way enabled staff to monitor whether children's individual needs were being met, and to reflect together on how areas could be further developed to provide high quality play experiences.

Parents were actively encouraged to work with staff in supporting their child's play, learning and development, for example, through home link bags and by participating in stay and play sessions. Parents responding to our survey shared examples of this within their comments, "Target setting, stay and play invitation to offer help and get involved with activities. Learning journal." This demonstrated a partnership approach to supporting children to achieve.

Children's play and learning stories were recorded within their individual online learning journals. These contained annotated photographs to illustrate staff observations of children, including significant achievements, so that children's progress could be tracked and supported. The team leader was monitoring the content of children's learning journals to make sure there was consistency across the team and that journals had a respectful tone.

How good is our setting? 5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore, we evaluated this key question as very good.

Quality Indicator 2.2: Children experience high quality facilities
The service was based within a purpose built school, with high quality fittings and furniture, so that children felt they mattered. Being part of the wider school community supported positive transitions for children, as they become familiar with the building layout and people within it.

The playroom and outdoor play areas were safe and secure, welcoming and stimulating, which contributed to children being safe, active and meaningfully engaged in their play. Children had access to a good range of resources that were clean, well-organised and encouraged
exploration and fun. Children's direct access to play outdoors, regardless of the weather, enabled them to follow their play intentions. Extra waterproof suits and wellies were provided by the setting and we observed children independently putting these on when they wished to play outdoors. Staff should continue to evaluate the configuration of the playroom to enable a smooth and inviting pathway to outdoors, particularly for children who need more encouragement. Further energetic play opportunities within local woodlands also promoted children's physical development and overall health and wellbeing.

Parents appreciated the breadth of experience offered to their children, particularly outdoors. Their comments included, "Woodland walks, sports in MUGA pitch, playing in the garden, making snowmen, colour walk." Some parents had also been keen to contribute to the development of high quality facilities for children, for example, through volunteering to improve the garden and by fundraising to create a sensory/ multi purpose room. This demonstrated that staff encouraged and utilized parent's knowledge and skills to the benefit of children.

Children's safety was promoted through risk assessments for all areas and activities accessed by them. Children had been involved in the risk assessments for some areas, using pictorial prompts. This was helping children develop analytical skills, and to take responsibility for managing their own safety. The service provider had an effective system for reporting any repairs or faults, which were generally actioned in a timely manner to remove any hazards. Children were also kept safe and healthy because of the infection control measures that were in place within the setting. For example, children were supported to wash their hands at key times throughout the day. During our inspection, we highlighted where practice could be improved, such as updating the décor in the nappy changing area and removing wall displays. This would make the area easier to keep hygienically clean and prevent any cross infection.

How good is our leadership? 5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore, we evaluated this key question as very good.

Quality Indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well
This was the first inspection for the service. The manager and staff engaged very well with the process and professional discussions with inspectors. There was a clear management structure with the school head teacher as the registered manager, the depute taking responsibility for the early level, and a team leader supporting day-to-day running of the setting, including support for staff. This new management team were developing a culture of continuous improvement within the setting, that placed children and families at the centre of service delivery. It was evident that both staff and parents believed their views were valued within the development of the service. For example, everyone was involved in developing the new values and vision for the service, to ensure that it was relevant to their wishes and needs.

A very good balance of information was displayed for parents within the children's cloakroom area at the entrance to the accommodation. This helped parents find out about how their child spent their day at the setting, as well as the support available for their family. They could see the outcome of any questionnaires and there was a suggestion box for sharing more ideas. This helped ensure everyone was working together to achieve the best outcomes for children. Parents' comments on their involvement in developing the setting included, "Regular communication and consultation. I always have the opportunity to share my views. The staff are always keen for feedback and anything that could help the establishment."

The setting had an improvement plan and used self evaluation tools, such as 'How good is our early learning and childcare' (HGIOELC) to discuss what they did well and how they could improve. This was having a positive impact and helped identify strengths within the setting and improvement priorities. The self-evaluation floor book highlighted how children were involved in the improvement journey for the service, using their annotated artwork and photographs to give children a voice.

Staff each had champion roles that reflected the service priorities as well as their own interests and strengths. Regular team meetings and staff training opportunities helped staff reflect on their practice, learning and development, and how this impacted on the quality of children's experiences. The team leader had a defined role within the management team, modelling good practice for the team and offering guidance. This contributed to the team building in confidence and capacity. Staff told us they appreciated the management team's visibility within the playroom, which they found supportive. Their comments included, "We can always approach our team leader with any issue and we feel listened too, we can come up with solutions together. Staff are encouraged to share their opinions at meetings and are also encouraged to make use of the open door policy (to management)."

As there was a new management team in post, we asked that the service provider ensure that leaders were clear about their role and responsibilities in relation to notifications that must be made to regulatory bodies. For example, this could be embedded in the induction process.

How good is our staff team? 5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore, we evaluated this key question as very good.

Quality Indicator 4.3: Staff deployment

Good staff retention and staff support ensured a staff team who worked very well together in delivering high quality experiences for children. The time given to a range of professional activities, including training from external agencies, meant staff felt valued and respected and promoted positive staff attendance. New staff shared their experience of induction with us, which they believed to be thorough and made them feel welcome and immediately part of the team. They were supported by a mentor who familiarised them with the expectations of their new role and responsibilities. We encouraged management and staff to make more explicit reference to the national induction resource. This would ensure everyone was familiar with the Scottish Government's expectations of national standards for early learning and childcare.

The management team made good use of the differing experience, knowledge and skills of the staff team. For example, children with additional needs received one-to-one support from a trusted adult when needed, so that they felt included and respected. Staff effectively communicated with each other if they needed to move away from their designated area to ensure appropriate information was shared about children's individual needs. As a result, there was always a safe number of adults caring for children.

There was a clear emphasis on nurture and wellbeing throughout the setting that was extended to staff. Staff breaks during the day were planned to minimise any impact on children whilst enabling staff to rest and be refreshed. When staff feel cared for and valued, their mood reflects on their interactions with the children they care for, contributing to them feeling settled. It also meant children's experience of quality engagement with staff across the whole day was positive and that they were safe. Staff comments about support for their wellbeing included, "We have a weekly staff meeting, staff are able to phone management for support and advice at any point of the day. Management offer additional breaks if required to ensure our wellbeing needs are being met. Management are approachable and caring towards staff."

The majority of parents agreed that there was always enough staff and that staff had taken time to build trusting relationships with their family. Parent comments included, "I feel comfortable enough that should an issue arise I could discuss this with any of the staff not just my daughter's key worker. They greet you warmly every morning." High-quality engagement with families enables a partnership approach to supporting children to reach their full potential.

Complaints

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

Detailed evaluations

How good is our care, play and learning?	5 - Very Good
1.1 Nurturing care and support	5 - Very Good
1.3 Play and learning	5 - Very Good

How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	5 - Very Good

How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	5 - Very Good

How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good
4.3 Staff deployment	5 - Very Good

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