

Early learning and childcare (ELC) setting shared inspection report

St Helen's Primary School Nursery Class

North Lanarkshire Council

20 January 2026

In October 2025, a team of inspectors from Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate visited St Helen's Primary School Nursery Class. During our visit, we talked to parents/carers and children and worked closely with the headteacher and staff.

Key inspection findings

- Children are happy, enthusiastic and confident. They enjoy learning in nursery. They show respect and kindness as they learn and play together.
- Led by the headteacher, and ably supported by the acting nursery lead, staff have developed a calm and purposeful learning environment. The strong relationships and warm, positive interactions are a key strength of the setting.
- Staff provide a wide range of good quality and exciting learning opportunities that support children to make good progress.
- Staff were at the early stages of developing the use of communication tools to strengthen the children's voice within the setting.
- Senior management encouraged and supported staff to take on leadership roles and provided continuous support and guidance.
- Children were supported well during transitions to meet their individual needs and personal preferences.
- Mealtimes were a sociable and relaxed time of day, allowing children and staff to sit together and talk about their day.
- Strong connections with families helped children to develop a sense of belonging between their family and the setting, fostering a family-centred culture and the opportunity to build strong relationships.

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	good
Learning, teaching and assessment	good
Nurturing, care and support	good
Children's progress	good

Summary of inspection findings

Key contextual Information

St Helen's Nursery Class is situated within St Helen's Primary School in Condorrat, Cumbernauld. The setting consists of two playrooms with access to outdoors for children aged three to those not yet attending primary school. All children access the school gym, library and lunch hall. Children access 1140 hours of early learning childcare (ELC) between 8.45 am and 2.45 pm five days a week during term time. The setting is registered for a maximum of 50 children not yet attending primary school at any one time. There are currently 25 children on the roll.

The headteacher has overall strategic responsibility for the nursery class. There are three early learning practitioners, two part-time and two full-time early learning support workers and a full-time acting early learning lead practitioner.

Leadership: Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

Opportunities for professional development enabled staff to identify and agree future learning and leadership roles. All staff were committed to their professional development. Almost all staff had either recently or were undergoing qualifications in childcare to further enhance their skills and knowledge. Senior management encouraged and supported staff to take on leadership roles and provided meaningful continuous support and guidance. As a result, staff demonstrated a strong understanding of child development and were eager to continue their professional development journey. For example, in making improvements in the planning process to monitor and track children's progress and next steps.

Staff were at the early stages of developing the use of communication tools to strengthen children's voice within the setting. For example, they had introduced the use of floor books to record children's thoughts, ideas and feelings to inform their experiences. We agreed with the service plans that it would be beneficial for staff to attend further training opportunities to strengthen their skills in consultations with children. Exploring children's rights could also help strengthen the children's voice and create a setting where their voices are used to further enhance their experiences. For example, enhancing staff confidence in encouraging children's ownership of their play-based learning experiences will better enable children to pursue their interests and deepen their learning.

Strong bonds had been formed between staff and senior management, resulting in staff being comfortable to share their views and ideas. One staff told us following a training event that they had shared their learning with colleagues. This had helped staff to develop skills in identifying and using effective strategies to support children to regulate their emotions. Staff were confident in leading projects to enhance outcomes for children, knowing their ideas were valued and respected. This should support staff as they undertake and implement further training for example, in using tools to strengthen the children's voice within the setting.

Effective induction processes supported staff to feel welcomed and a valued part of the team. Staff recognised the importance of strong teamwork and worked well together, with clear roles and responsibilities. Each member understood their role which led to the seamless flow to the day, including key transitions such as lunchtime. In addition, extra staff were employed to cover staff lunches which provided continuity and consistency for the children and colleagues, during these times.

There was a mix of staff skills and experience within the setting. Staff had the skills and knowledge to undertake their designated roles and responsibilities. Staff with leadership roles would benefit from further training and support. For example, when measuring the quality of aspects within the service, using best practice guidance. Through continued professional development their leadership skills and knowledge will ensure best practice guidance is fully implemented and continues to improve outcomes for children.

Staff were skilled communicators. Collaborative working helped to ensure that all staff were well informed of the information required to meet the needs of the children. They responded to children's needs sensitively and in a timely manner, due to being well positioned around the setting. Staff were based in an area within the setting, but we saw that they were flexible and moved to other areas when needed, for example if more children choose to play outside.

Children play and learn: Learning, teaching and assessment

Staff use sensitively individualised strategies to support a few children who find it difficult to settle on arrival to the setting. These strategies help children to regulate their emotions, build their confidence, and engage in learning. Almost all children play well with each other, demonstrating kind and caring attitudes. Staff actively build strong, trusting relationships with children and families, which form a key strength of the setting. Families frequently share positive feedback about the support they and their children receive from staff.

Children enthusiastically explore the spacious learning environment, which offers a wide range of attractive, motivating, and well-balanced resources across the curriculum. Staff actively support and engage children, enabling most to sustain their focus on learning for extended periods. For example, children use torches to explore shadows and experiment with pattern in light and dark surroundings. As already identified, staff should now provide further opportunities for all children to contribute meaningfully to their learning. This will help children see themselves as independent learners. Staff should also increase opportunities for children to influence the development of the setting. They should ensure all children's voices are heard and valued in shaping the learning environment.

All staff interact with children in a respectful, fun and friendly manner. They are attuned to children and their individual needs, interests and learning styles. This promotes a calm and purposeful learning environment. All staff demonstrate a high level of skill in their use of questioning techniques, effectively supporting children to extend and deepen their knowledge and understanding. For example, staff use mathematical language during conversation. This results in a few children commenting on the symmetry and shape of their drawings. Children make effective

use of an interactive whiteboard to support their understanding of numeracy through number games.

Staff skilfully observe children and regularly record their significant learning to share with parents through informal chats and on an online platform. They use this evidence to plan children's future learning. Staff provide a wide range of exciting experiences based on Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes. Moving forward, staff should now consider the balance between adult-initiated, adult-led, and child-led activities. This should allow children to make choices, be more creative and be more involved in their learning. To better demonstrate depth in children's learning and highlight responsive planning, staff now need to streamline their planning format. Senior leaders support staff effectively in systematically tracking children's progress using both local authority and in-house tracking systems. Staff use this assessment information well to identify groups of children who may require additional support with their learning, such as in numeracy. This targeted support positively impacts on children's progress. As already identified, staff should consider tracking other areas of focus for example literacy, health and wellbeing and other curricular areas. Staff should use this assessment information to clearly monitor and evaluate the impact on children's learning and progress.

Children are supported to achieve: Nurturing care and support

The service recognised the importance of nurturing relationships being essential in children's growth and development. Being kind to others, showing love and making others feel happy was embedded within the setting's vision and values. These values had enabled staff to work in partnership to create a setting where children received warm, consistent and responsive care and support. This supported children to feel safe and secure within the setting.

Children were supported during transitions to meet their individual needs. For example, strategies were in place to support children when they started attending the service or when they moved on to primary school. As a result, staff minimised disruption to children during these times by making transitions as smooth as possible.

Mealtimes were a sociable and relaxed time of day for children and staff to sit together and talk about their experiences. Children had opportunities to choose from nutritious foods, and the menus considered children's cultural and dietary needs, aligned with current dietary guidelines. The snack and mealtime routines could be further developed by considering looking more through the eyes of the child, promoting increased independence, including letting children make more decisions about mealtimes.

Each child had a personal plan and learning journal in place, which contained identified targets for children to achieve and suggested opportunities to support these. Staff had collaborated with families and other agencies such as speech and language therapists, when needed. This helped to ensure for children that required additional support clear goals and helpful strategies were agreed. Every child's personal plan should reflect them as an individual and inform staff what is important to them and how this can be supported within the setting. To achieve better consistency within all personal plans, the service could consider recording more

information on children's needs and details of agreed strategies used to support these.

Families were welcomed into the service each day. They shared what they liked about the service, which included that staff kept them informed about their child's care and gave them support and advice. As a result, parents felt reassured that staff loved and cared for their children.

Staff recognised the importance of collaboration with families. To support this, they regularly welcomed families into the service for 'come and play' sessions and meetings to discuss their child's experiences. Having strong connections with families helped children to develop a sense of belonging between their family and the setting, fostering a family-centred culture and the opportunity to build strong relationships.

Children are supported to achieve: Children's progress

Children access a wide range of engaging, highly motivating, and meaningful experiences that support their learning and development well across the curriculum. Staff thoughtfully plan and deliver these experiences in ways that stimulate curiosity, imagination, and creativity. As a result, almost all children, including children who require additional support, make good progress in their learning.

Most children benefit from regular access to the outdoor area where they engage in a wide range of purposeful activities that support their physical development. They demonstrate increasing confidence and coordination as they climb, run, and balance across varied surfaces, effectively developing their gross motor skills. Staff provide sensitive and responsive support during daily emotional check-ins. These enable children to explore and articulate their feelings. Staff consistently use the language of the wellbeing indicators to deepen children's understanding of what it means to be safe. For example, children are supported to assess risks in the outdoor environment, promoting independence and decision-making. Children learn about healthy choices through meaningful interactions with staff, particularly during snack time. These conversations encourage children to reflect on their food choices and understand the importance of healthy eating.

Staff support all children to help them gain knowledge and understanding of their world by providing real-life experiences that inspire imagination. For example, children explore the detail of minibeasts through books and pictures. Most children mark-make using a variety of tools and materials, with their drawings and paintings showing increasing detail. Staff are positive role models for children through their nurturing and respectful interactions. They enthusiastically encourage children to try new experiences, extend their knowledge and make strong progress in their learning. Children often initiate and enjoy opportunities to share a favourite story with their friends. They recall a storyline with confidence. Most children identify numbers up to 10 in play scenarios as they explore number lines and count familiar objects. Most children confidently make choices about their learning. Staff use mind maps to record what children want to learn in a floor book. This approach is still at an early stage of development. Staff should create more opportunities for children to share their own skills with each other and recognise themselves as successful learners.

Staff share children's early learning experiences and achievements with families through an online platform and display them on their 'proud cloud'. They regularly refer to children's achievements using praise and feedback. Staff effectively use the assessment information they gather to inform planning and identify the skills children are developing. They should now make children's next steps in learning more explicit. This approach could help staff build a more holistic view of each child's progress over time. Sharing this should empower families to be more meaningfully involved in their child's learning journey and encourage them to share learning from home.

Staff demonstrate a strong understanding of the cultural, socio-economic, and linguistic context of families. The setting sits at the heart of the community. Staff prioritise time to meet with families and consistently show themselves to be approachable, respectful, and sensitive to individual circumstances. They respond proactively by referring children to external agencies and, where appropriate, implement suggested strategies in a timely manner. This collaborative approach with families and partners leads to improved outcomes for children.

Safeguarding (HMI)

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. At the time of the inspection, there were no identified areas for development.

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.

Gillian Frew

HM Inspector

Kara Doonan

Care Inspector