

# Sgoil Araich nan Loch Day Care of Children

Sgoil nan Loch  
Leurbost  
Lochs  
Isle of Lewis  
HS2 9PE

Telephone: 01851 705 187

**Type of inspection:**  
Unannounced

**Completed on:**  
29 October 2025

**Service provided by:**  
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

**Service provider number:**  
SP2003002104

**Service no:**  
CS2005113754

## About the service

Sgoil Àraich nan Loch is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 40 children from the age of two years to those not yet attending primary school. The service provides Gàidhlig and Gàidhlig learners education in two rooms within Sgoil nan Loch.

The nursery provides pre-school education in partnership with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. Children are funded for pre-school education from the age of three years.

## About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 28 October 2025 between 08:30 and 17:00. Feedback was given to the service on 29 October 2025. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate. To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this 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:

- spoke with 16 children attending the service
- spoke with seven staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents
- received electronic feedback from three families

As part of this inspection, we undertook a focus area. We have gathered specific information to help us understand more about how services support children's safety, wellbeing and engagement in their play and learning. This included reviewing the following aspects:

- staff deployment
- safety of the physical environment, indoors and outdoors
- the quality of personal plans and how well children's needs are being met
- children's engagement with the experiences provided in their setting.

This information will be anonymised and analysed to help inform our future work with services.

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, improvements were identified relating to core assurances. We have reported where improvement is necessary within the Leadership heading of this report.

## Key messages

- The service successfully strengthened its community ethos and improved outcomes for children through inclusive vision-setting, strategic self-evaluation, targeted audits, and a stable, reflective staff team committed to continuous improvement.
- The service enhanced children's wellbeing, independence, and sense of belonging through inclusive environmental improvements, responsive care practices, and strong partnerships with families and the wider community.
- The thoughtfully planned learning environment and responsive staff practice positively impacted children's engagement, creativity, and development.
- Staff created a nurturing, responsive, and inclusive environment where strong relationships, tailored care, and meaningful family engagement positively impacted children's emotional wellbeing, learning, and independence.
- The service should further develop the quality of recorded observations to ensure entries are more individualised and reflective of each child's unique progress, challenges, and achievements.

## 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 thrive and develop in quality spaces	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

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.

### Quality indicator: Leadership and management of staff and resources

Sgoil Àraich had recently undertaken a comprehensive refresh of its vision, values, and aims through a collaborative consultation process involving children, families, staff, and members of the wider community. This inclusive approach culminated in the launch of the new vision at a well-attended community event, where school pupils confidently presented the updated ethos to families and local supporters. To mark the occasion, all attendees were welcomed as "Real Lochies" and received wristbands symbolising their belonging to the school community. This initiative fostered a strong sense of ownership and pride across stakeholders. Feedback indicated that participants felt heard and included, which contributed to the relevance and meaningfulness of the final vision.

The service had implemented a self-evaluation calendar to support continuous improvement throughout the setting. The new quality improvement framework had been introduced by the management team and was being embedded within self-evaluation activities. This framework supported reflective practice and contributed to improved outcomes for children and families.

Targeted improvement work had been successfully carried out through the strategic use of audits, focusing on key areas of nursery provision. These included outdoor learning, Gaelic immersion, pre-writing skills, and literacy across the nursery environment. Each audit was used to identify strengths and areas for development, leading to focused action planning and measurable improvements. The outdoor learning audit, in particular, had a notably positive impact. Staff had enhanced the quality and variety of outdoor experiences, resulting in increased opportunities for play, exploration, and learning. Children benefited from more frequent and meaningful engagement with the natural environment, which supported their physical development, creativity, and curiosity. Parents who provided feedback told us "My child's outdoor area has been improved greatly over the last year and they enjoy playing in the mud kitchen, going for walks and playing on the bikes and my child has helped develop the outdoor area."

Audits in Gaelic immersion and pre-writing skills had also led to improved practice. Staff had embedded Gaelic language more consistently throughout daily routines, and enhancements to the literacy-rich environment had supported children's early writing development. These improvements reflected a strong commitment to continuous improvement and a clear focus on achieving positive outcomes for children.

The service had benefitted from a stable and consistent staff team, which positively influenced the overall quality of care and learning. Staff reported feeling supported and valued within the setting, contributing to a strong team ethos and a positive working environment.

Regular opportunities for staff to meet in whole or sub-groups had supported professional dialogue, reflection, and development. These sessions enabled staff to share practice, build confidence, and contribute to ongoing improvement. As a result, children benefitted from a well-supported and motivated team who worked collaboratively to provide high-quality experiences.

## Children thrive and develop in quality spaces 5 - Very Good

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.

### Quality Indicator: Children experience high quality spaces

The installation of additional toilet and changing facilities toilets for children in the Gaelic medium setting had a positive impact on children's privacy, dignity, and independence. Improved access to these facilities enabled children to manage their personal care needs in a respectful and developmentally appropriate manner, promoting autonomy and supporting their wellbeing.

Children were meaningfully involved in shaping their outdoor learning environment. Staff employed child-centred consultation methods, including mind mapping, to gather children's ideas and preferences. This inclusive approach ensured that children's voices were central to the planning process, empowering them to take ownership of their learning space. As a result, children experienced a stronger sense of pride and belonging.

The changes made to the outdoor area reflected children's interests and supported their curiosity, exploration, and sustained engagement. By embedding children's rights into decision-making processes, the service enhanced children's confidence and ensured that outdoor learning experiences were both relevant and enriching.

The service provided an inclusive environment for all children attending. Where children required specialist equipment to support their care and development this was provided. This ensured children's needs could be met with dignity, safety and care.

Robust security procedures were in place to safeguard children. Visitors accessed the service via the main school entrance, where clerical staff managed secure buzzer entry and sign-in/out systems. Parents entered through the playrooms, maintaining a safe and controlled environment.

Outdoor safety was supported by perimeter fencing and gates. A suggestion to add a bungee-style clip to the final gate was actioned by the head teacher, who also committed to updating the fire evacuation procedure accordingly.

Children's personal information was generally stored appropriately and in line with expected standards. However, instances were identified where sensitive information had been recorded within children's personal plans. This practice did not align with best practice guidance for information security and confidentiality. When highlighted to the management team this was addressed immediately.

## Children play and learn 5 - Very Good

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.

### Quality indicator: Playing, learning and developing

The carefully planned and well-resourced learning environment had a clear and positive impact on children's engagement, creativity, and learning.

A wide variety of areas and materials encouraged exploration, imaginative play, and skill development across multiple curriculum areas, contributing to a rich and stimulating learning experience.

Children were observed actively engaging in sensory, literacy, and numeracy experiences. The autumn-themed exploration area sparked curiosity and investigative skills, while the numeracy zone supported early number recognition and mark-making. Activities such as potion-making with pumpkins and shaving foam promoted imaginative play and fine motor development, enhancing children's physical coordination and creative expression.

The cosy story area, featuring a wide selection of high-quality books, supported language development and fostered a love of reading. Overall, the environment was inviting, purposeful, and responsive to children's interests, resulting in high levels of engagement, enjoyment, and sustained participation.

The service demonstrated a strong balance of responsive and intentional planning, which effectively supported children's interests and learning. Staff were observed responding promptly to children's requests and adapting activities and resources to meet their needs and curiosities in the moment. This approach created a nurturing and engaging environment where children felt listened to and valued. Parents appreciated the opportunities their children had to direct their own play and learning. One parent commented "My child is involved with planning the topic, planning games and where they can play."

Staff consistently celebrated children's achievements, offering praise and encouragement. One notable example included a staff member recording a child's success on an achievement cloud and placing it on the "Wow Wall." This reinforced positive recognition and boosted self-esteem. As a result, children were confident, motivated, and actively engaged in their learning. The planning approach contributed to a child-centred ethos where individual interests and achievements were meaningfully supported and celebrated.

The service used the online platform Seesaw to record and share children's learning experiences with families. This strengthened communication between the setting and home, enabling families to remain informed and engaged in their child's learning journey. There was evidence of improvement in how observations were recorded, with staff becoming more confident in documenting learning. However, there remained scope to further develop the quality of entries to ensure they were more individualised and reflective of each child's unique progress, challenges, and achievements.

## Children are supported to achieve **5 - Very Good**

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.

### Quality indicator: Nurturing care and support

Staff had developed warm, trusting relationships with children, which contributed to a secure and emotionally nurturing environment. Children were observed as settled and confident, and staff demonstrated a strong understanding of individual needs and personalities. These relationships supported children's emotional wellbeing and created a foundation for positive learning experiences. Parents who provided feedback commented about the nurturing care their children received at the service. Some of their comments included, "The staff really know my child and make him feel happy and secure. The effort that is put into the learning and development of my child is brilliant. I receive daily communication about what my child has been up to and what they have been learning and staff always give a warm welcome and always welcome my child and ask how they are each day."

Positive interactions were consistently evident. Staff used humour and playful language to build rapport and support communication. For example, staff deliberately named fruit incorrectly, prompting children to correct them. This strategy encouraged language development, boosted confidence, and fostered a sense of fun and connection between children and adults.

A particularly strong example of emotional support was observed when a child became upset following a fall. The staff member responded with empathy and reassurance, using positive language and offering comfort through cuddles and gentle conversation. The child was given choices throughout the experience, including selecting a bravery sticker and being supported to change in a private and respectful manner. Staff used creative strategies, such as dressing a soft toy to encourage cooperation, which helped the child feel safe and in control. These interactions reflected a caring and responsive ethos, where children felt valued, respected, and emotionally secure.

Children received consistent and nurturing care from staff who knew them well. This familiarity helped children feel safe and supported within the setting. Staff used information gathered from parents prior to children joining the service to tailor care to individual needs, preferences, and areas requiring support. Personal plans were regularly updated to reflect children's progress and any changes to routines, ensuring care remained responsive and relevant. As a result, children experienced smooth transitions into the service and benefitted from care that was well-matched to their developmental stage and emotional needs.

Staff were aware of and responsive to children's health and medical needs, which contributed to a safe and caring environment. Effective systems had been put in place to ensure that medication was stored and administered safely, in line with best practice. During the inspection, a child was observed receiving medication and first aid in a gentle, dignified, and responsive manner. Staff provided reassurance and care, demonstrating sensitivity and respect throughout the process. This approach helped the child feel safe, supported, and comforted during a potentially distressing moment. The service's attention to health needs and respectful care practices had a positive impact on children's emotional wellbeing and physical safety.

Families were welcomed into the service and encouraged to be part of its day-to-day life. Staff consistently shared and received information from parents during drop-off and collection times, which helped build strong relationships and supported continuity of care. The service recognised the value of involving families in children's learning. A project inviting family members to share childhood memories, such as games they played, how they travelled to school, and the food they ate resulted in a video capturing their comments. Children responded with excitement and pride when seeing their relatives featured in the video. This initiative strengthened connections between home and nursery and created a meaningful link with the wider community. The video was shared with the Kinloch Historical Society, demonstrating a strong and respectful partnership with local heritage and culture. These efforts had a positive impact on children's sense of identity, belonging, and emotional wellbeing, while reinforcing the service's commitment to inclusive and community-focused practice.

Snack and mealtime routines supported children's social development and learning, with some opportunities for independence and conversation. Children were encouraged to wash their hands before snack, and tables were prepared with tablecloths to create a calm and respectful atmosphere. Children participated in snack preparation through the role of "class helper," assisting with chopping fruit using child-safe knives. Staff engaged children in meaningful conversations about healthy and unhealthy foods, supporting their understanding of nutrition.

Children were also encouraged to count and distribute plates, promoting early numeracy skills. However, there were missed opportunities to further promote independence. While children poured their own drinks, staff prepared and plated all food items, including buttering bagels and cutting fruit. At lunchtime, meals were pre-plated with no opportunity for children to serve themselves, despite the small group size making this feasible. Encouraging more child involvement in food preparation and serving could have enhanced independence, decision-making, and life skills.

## Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at [www.careinspectorate.com](http://www.careinspectorate.com).



## Detailed evaluations

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Leadership and management of staff and resources	5 - Very Good
Children thrive and develop in quality spaces	5 - Very Good
Children experience high quality spaces	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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Care Inspectorate  
Compass House  
11 Riverside Drive  
Dundee  
DD1 4NY

[enquiries@careinspectorate.com](mailto:enquiries@careinspectorate.com)

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