

# Sandbank Primary Pre Five Unit Day Care of Children

Sandbank Primary School  
Sandbank  
High Road  
Dunoon  
PA23 8PW

Telephone: 01369 706 350

**Type of inspection:**  
Unannounced

**Completed on:**  
20 March 2026

**Service provided by:**  
Argyll and Bute Council

**Service provider number:**  
SP2003003373

**Service no:**  
CS2003014661

## About the service

Sandbank Primary Pre Five Unit is located in Sandbank, Dunoon. The early learning and childcare service offers both English and Gaelic speaking provisions and is currently registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 40 children not yet attending primary school at any one time.

- of those 40 no more than 0 are aged under 2 years
- no more than 5 are aged 2 years to under 3 years
- no more than 35 are aged 3 years to those not yet attending primary school full time.

Adult:child ratios will be a minimum of:

- Under 2 years - 1:3
- 2 years to under 3 years - 1:5
- 3 years and over - 1:8 if the children attend more than 4 hours per day, or
- 1:10 if the children attend for less than 4 hours per day
- If all children are over 8 years old and over 1:10.

The service is provided by Argyll and Bute Council.

## About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Thursday 19 and Friday 20 March 2026. The inspection was carried out by one early learning and childcare inspector 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 and observed 18 children using the service
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

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, no improvements were identified relating to core assurances.

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.

**Key messages**

- Children experienced calm, supportive daily routines that promoted independence and healthy habits.
- Warm, nurturing relationships supported children's emotional wellbeing.
- The service demonstrated strong, collaborative leadership and a positive culture of continuous improvement.
- Children experienced high quality, nurturing play and learning opportunities.
- Quality assurance and staffing systems were developing but required further consistency and clarity.
- Planning, observation and assessment systems required further development.
- Management and staff should streamline documentation and planning across both settings.

**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	4 - 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.

Throughout the inspection, we found that management and the staff team responded well to professional discussion and demonstrated a positive attitude towards improvement. Staff remained open to advice and showed a clear willingness to consider new approaches. Evidence from observations and conversations showed that relationships within the team were strong. Management and staff demonstrated commitment to developing the service, enabling them to work effectively together to promote positive outcomes for children and families. Parents told us: "I think there is kindest and care that radiates from the staff. I am so grateful for how much they truly care about my child and their progress and development" and "I think the nursery is fantastic and I am extremely grateful for everything they do."

The staff team presented as enthusiastic, reflective practitioners who confidently discussed the service's improvement journey and the learning gained over recent years. Weekly team meetings provided regular opportunities to reflect on practice, discuss children's progress and plan next steps. This consistent reflective practice helped the team identify improvements and evaluate the impact of their work. Based on the evidence gathered, we are confident that the service has a solid foundation for continued development. Moving forward, it would be beneficial for the lead practitioner to participate in the Gaelic unit's team meetings to ensure they contribute effectively to all early learning and childcare delivered across the setting.

Management, staff, children and families recently reviewed the service's vision, values and aims, clearly reflecting the aspirations of all stakeholders. Observations and discussions confirmed that these were embedded in the daily life of both early learning and childcare settings, creating a safe, happy, fun and nurturing environment where children, staff and families felt respected, included and valued. This process ensured that the views of children, families and staff meaningfully shaped the service's direction.

The service valued parental and community involvement and used a range of methods to gather views, including daily informal interactions, newsletters, questionnaires and an open-door approach. These approaches offered accessible ways for parents to share their opinions and contribute to improvement. To strengthen this further, we suggested that the service provide clearer feedback to families on how their views inform change, for example through a "you said, we did" model. This would demonstrate that parental contributions are listened to and acted upon. Parents told us: "All staff are amazing! They always take time to greet you, listen to any questions or problems you may have, always resolve anything that's needed, they are just genuinely amazing staff" and "My child loves the staff which is so lovely to see. I am so grateful of how caring, kind, and thoughtful the staff are. They always keep me updated and are there for any questions I have."

Both settings engaged regularly with the local community, visiting places such as the library, hotels, the community centre and the beach. They also planned a visit to the local playgroup to support the development of Gaelic within the community. These experiences supported valuable relationships and helped children develop meaningful links with their local environment.

The management team had developed quality assurance processes to support ongoing improvement. Through discussions with the manager and lead practitioner, we gained a clear understanding of the service's improvement priorities, including strengthening children's health and wellbeing and improving achievement in literacy and numeracy. We observed early progress across several areas. To ensure improvements are embedded and sustained, the service needs to continue monitoring practice and reviewing the quality of children's experiences. A quality assurance calendar supported management to plan and carry out tasks throughout the year, and regular audits provided structure and consistency to the evaluation process.

Going forward, the management team should develop a more formal process for monitoring staff practice, engagement and delivery of experiences. This will support staff effectively and ensure they receive appropriate guidance, support and professional learning opportunities to maintain high quality outcomes for children and families.

We discussed the need to develop clear roles and responsibilities for the lead practitioner and the head teacher. A review of the lead practitioner's time in the service should be considered to enable her to support, observe and engage with the Gaelic unit, ensuring an integrated approach across the whole setting. The staff team would benefit from her experience in developing and enhancing the Gaelic early learning and childcare service, particularly in relation to planning, documenting children's play and learning and supporting the team effectively.

## Children play and learn 4 - Good

### Quality indicator: Play learning and developing

We evaluated this quality indicator as good, where there were important strengths within the setting's work and some aspects which could benefit from improvement.

Children were happy, relaxed and fully engaged in their play. They interacted positively with peers, showing developing friendships and cooperative skills. Children confidently led their own learning, with staff offering timely and appropriate support. A wide range of experiences promoted language, literacy, creativity, curiosity and sensory exploration, such as stories, singing, outdoor water play, planting and bug hunting. Staff read and sang with children individually and in small groups, contributing to a nurturing, language rich environment. Parents told us: "I absolutely adore the nursery and everything about it. I would love to see more families know how amazing this place is and for their little ones to be part of such a wonderful place" and "I think the nursery is fantastic and I am extremely grateful for everything they do."

We saw a positive balance of adult initiated and freely chosen experiences, supporting children's development across literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing and creative skills. Outdoor play formed a significant part of the day and effectively supported learning. Staff designed outdoor spaces that stimulated curiosity and imagination while promoting physical development. Children confidently used bikes, explored loose parts, balanced on blocks and searched enthusiastically for bugs. Staff provided appropriate supervision and encouragement, enabling children to challenge themselves safely and develop problem solving and teamwork skills. Most children benefited from free flow access, and staff actively encouraged exploration within well considered outdoor areas.

We discussed the need for the Gaelic early learning and childcare service to further develop free flow outdoor play for all children. This would strengthen independence, decision-making and continuity in learning by enabling children to revisit and consolidate skills.

Staff used nurturing, responsive approaches to recognise and respond to children's cues, supporting self-regulation, confidence and creativity. They sensitively guided children during play and routines to help them understand feelings, express emotions and seek support. Interactions were warm and attuned to children's needs, and as a result children collaborated well, shared, took turns and engaged in imaginative and cooperative play. Parents told us: "I love that the nursery have a perfect balance of structured and child lead play. My child really benefits from this and a huge reason I know Gaelic medium was right for [them] and "Our child has grown leaps and bounds with this balance and has grasped the Gaelic language dramatically since starting."

Evidence from indoor, outdoor and community experiences showed that children accessed opportunities that supported imagination, enquiry and enjoyment. Scrapbooks, folders, floor books and the online platform Seesaw documented elements of children's play and learning, demonstrating some progress over time.

A planning system was in place but staff told us this remained a working progress. At the time of inspection, the approach did not yet provide consistent tracking of progression, depth of learning or clear next steps. We highlighted the importance of more responsive planning, building learning pathways around children's interests, and increasing challenge and continuity within play based experiences. The system now needs to be streamlined to ensure consistency across both the Gaelic and English settings and to demonstrate breadth, progression and depth more clearly in learning.

We would encourage staff and management to continue strengthening observation, assessment and planning. This should include focused observations, effective assessment processes, high quality provocations and improved recording of progress and achievements. Enhancing these areas will provide clearer evidence of children's learning and development (see area for improvement 1).

## Areas for improvement

1. To support best outcomes for children in quality play and learning, the manager and staff should review the current planning cycle along with developing provocations and reflecting on how they document children's progress and achievements. This should include, but not be limited to, high quality observations, meaningful next steps and evidence of progression in learning.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: "As a child, I can direct my own play and activities in the way that I choose, and freely access a wide range of experiences and resources suitable to my age and stage, which stimulate my natural curiosity, learning and creativity" (HSCS 2.27) and "My care and support meets my needs and is right for me" (HSCS 1.19).

**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.

Throughout the inspection, we observed warm, nurturing interactions between staff and children. Staff knew children well and used caring, attuned approaches. Children had secure, trusting relationships with staff and sought comfort and reassurance when needed. They confidently involved staff in their play, reflecting a strong sense of emotional safety. Parents told us: "The teachers are incredible, kind, and devoted to not only the children, but the continuation of the Gaelic language and it shows every single day. The room is well equipped, the outside space is safe, and the field trips are perfectly curated" and "The teachers are great, very welcoming when dropping my child off, staff know all the kids by name, and you can tell they truly care."

Staff spoke confidently about each child's preferences, interests and family circumstances. Conversations with children were meaningful and personalised, contributing to children being relaxed, happy and confident. This demonstrated that staff invested time in building relationships with families and used this knowledge to support children's wellbeing. Parents told us: "Staff are amazing the school is perfect as it is I cannot thank everyone enough for what they have done for our family" and " I cannot praise the staff and service of Sandbank ELC enough, I have always felt that my children receive the best care I would want for them. They have just thrived and I honestly believe a lot of it is with the help and support and care they have been given by the team."

Individual profiles and personal plans were in place, and staff gathered relevant information to meet children's health, welfare and safety needs. Staff identified some next steps, but we discussed the need to streamline documentation to ensure children's supports and next steps were clearly identifiable and consistent across both settings. The service now needs to agree a single, coherent format for recording learning and planning.

Staff worked effectively with external agencies, ensuring coordinated support and positive outcomes for children and families. Risk assessments were in place for children who required them. Staff supported children's independence and emotional regulation sensitively. The environment offered spaces for social, solitary and small group play, and staff provided reassurance and calming support when needed. We would encourage the service to continue developing visual supports and communication strategies to strengthen engagement, independence and understanding.

Staff had created a warm, inclusive environment where families felt valued. Families were encouraged to contribute insights about their children's interests and achievements, which supported responsive, individualised care. Daily interactions, stay and play sessions, Bookbug events and care plan reviews helped strengthen partnerships and enhance children's experiences. A parent told us: "The communication between staff and parents is perfect and they are always very accommodating should I want to discuss anything with them. I love the relationship between the ELC and the school, it is making transitioning easier for my children who will be starting school this year, we are all sad to be leaving the ELC, but the children know they can go and visit."

Medication sampled during the inspection was stored and managed in line with best practice guidance. Management now needs to ensure permission forms are stored consistently with medication and implement a clear flowchart to guide staff when administering emergency medication such as inhalers.

Mealtimes were calm, sociable and unhurried. Children enjoyed daily hot meals and were supported to be independent through self-serving food and drinks. Staff sat with children, modelling positive eating habits and encouraging meaningful conversation. Snack consisted of fruit and water, and the service planned to add an appropriate carbohydrate option in line with Setting the Table guidance. We recommended reviewing lunch menus to ensure children consistently receive at least one fruit option and two vegetable choices and to reduce high carbohydrate meals that did not reflect best practice.

Children had access to fresh water throughout the session, and most used their own bottles independently. Some bottles contained juice which is not recommended in line with best practice guidance. Where individual needs require this, we ask that this be recorded clearly in children's personal plans.

We identified improvements needed in the food serving area within the English early learning and childcare service, as the current space was too small and did not support safe serving of hot meals. The provider agreed to review this and develop an appropriate, safe area.

## 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

Leadership	5 - Very Good
Leadership and management of staff and resources	5 - Very Good
Children play and learn	4 - Good
Playing, learning and developing	4 - Good
Children are supported to achieve	5 - Very Good
Nurturing care and support	5 - Very Good

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