

# Port Ellen Primary Pre Five Unit Day Care of Children

Port Ellen Primary School  
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Port Ellen  
Isle of Islay  
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**Type of inspection:**  
Unannounced

**Completed on:**  
17 June 2025

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

**Service provider number:**  
SP2003003373

**Service no:**  
CS2003014658

## About the service

The service was registered with the Care Inspectorate on 01 April 2011. Port Ellen Primary Pre Five Unit is located on the Isle of Islay, in the village of Port Ellen. The service is provided by Argyll and Bute Council. The early learning and childcare service is currently registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 32 children aged from 2 years old up to not yet attending school of whom a maximum of 10 may be aged 2 years. During the inspection, there were 23 children present on day 1 and day 2.

## About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 16 and 17 of June 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 people using the service
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents
- spoke with visiting professionals

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 warm relationships with staff who knew children and their families well.
- Children were empowered to lead their own play and learning, supported by a skilled staff team.
- Children enjoyed a fun environment that inspired their creativity and wonder.
- Children enjoyed free flow access outdoors and a wide range of outings in the local community.
- Strong leadership was creating a nurturing and responsive environment where children and staff felt safe and valued.

## 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

The setting was warm, welcoming, and nurturing. Children appeared happy, busy, and confident as they played and engaged with staff and friends. Staff were kind, supportive and friendly in their interactions with the children, helping children to feel secure and settled. Children were confident asking staff for help when they required it and care routines helped children become more independent, while also respecting their privacy and dignity. Staff discussed how children's rights were central to their ethos, and this was reflected in the United Nations Convention on Rights of a Child (UNCRC) signs used to identify links between the setting and children's rights.

The staff knew the children very well and were able to discuss their likes, dislikes and needs in detail. We sampled a range of children's personal plans. Each child had an 'All About Me' profile with helpful information about their needs, likes, and dislikes. Those children who were transitioning into the nursery or to school after the summer also had 'Marvellous Me at Home' documentation to support a smooth transition to their new environment. This included contributions from parents and carers, which helped staff tailor support to each child's individual needs and preferences. These thoughtful approaches ensured that transitions were child-centred, respectful, and well planned, promoting continuity of care and emotional security. Staff also worked well with other professionals to support children's development. As such, those children who required additional support or individual risk assessments had these in place. These plans were regularly reviewed with families and tailored to meet each child's specific needs, ensuring a consistent and coordinated approach. This collaborative working reflected a strong commitment to inclusive practice and early intervention. One parent told us 'Our child has developed friendships that will last a lifetime and has been encouraged to share / take turns and listen to others.'

Children enjoyed a healthy lunch that met their individual dietary needs. Those who preferred brought a packed lunch from home. Mealtimes were used to help children build independence and practise their fine motor skills, for example, by serving their own food, clearing their plates and using cutlery. Lunch was a calm and social time where children chatted with staff and friends on a range of subjects. This helped to build strong relationships and support the children's social and language development. Children who required additional support during mealtimes were assisted through collaboratively identified strategies, developed in partnership with parents and professionals. Staff were pleased to share the positive outcomes these strategies had achieved in supporting the children's progress.

Staff used an online application to share regular updates with parents, offering families a snapshot of their child's experiences at nursery. Children were actively involved in creating these posts, fostering a sense of ownership and pride in their learning. For example, one child scanned a QR code displayed alongside their work, which linked to a video of them confidently explaining the piece to their parent. This approach supported children in becoming confident learners by encouraging pride in their achievements, reflection on their work, and the development of critical thinking and digital literacy skills.

Medication was stored safely, and staff followed best practice. Management said they would continue to review permission forms in line with national guidance 'Management of Medication in Daycare and

Childminding Services.'

Accidents and incidents were recorded and shared with parents. The management audited these monthly to look for patterns and act if needed. This helped reduce repeated accidents and kept children safe.

### Quality indicator 1.3: Play and learning

We saw children enjoying a wide range of interesting play activities. Staff helped extend these activities to make them more challenging and exciting. For example, children were enjoying observing the various bugs in their garden. The staff used this interest to build play and learning experiences such as making butterflies using water paint and pipets and then identifying symmetry through the mirror. The bug theme was used to support pattern play and real-world science through the bug hotel and wormery where children could observe bugs evolving. We saw opportunities for early language, reading, and math skills across the play activities. For example, children enjoyed songs through book bug session and enjoyed reading books in the cosy story area.

Children had opportunities to lead in their own play and learning. For example, one child's interest in a story about a robot led to play and learning on building shapes to create a cardboard robot for the setting. One parent told us 'I'm constantly impressed with the variety and quality of the activities that they do with the children...My [child] has gained a lot of confidence and skills in things like numeracy since [they] started.'

Children were able to free flow into the secure outdoor play area, where staff had been developing the space to offer a rich and exciting range of play opportunities that promoted creativity, wonder, and discovery. We observed children enjoying activities such as den building, exploring the water taps, and creating structures using loose parts. The garden also encouraged opportunities for risky play, allowing children to assess and manage risks independently. For example, children could climb and use a variety of equipment to support their balance and coordination. Additionally, they demonstrated awareness of natural hazards such as nettles, gooseberries, and the pond. This environment supported children's physical development while fostering a sense of responsibility and independence in a safe and stimulating space.

Children enjoyed regular trips to places like the beaches, woodlands, soft play and parks. One child told us about the making of a map to find treasure on the secret beach. The children enjoyed using local transport to visit with other nursery settings on the island. One parent told us 'They are always out and about in our village, down the beaches and they attend soft play sessions at our local village hall each Friday.' These trips helped children learn new skills, build confidence, and feel connected to their local and wider community.

Staff within their key groups were recording children's learning based on their observations, evaluating progress, and identifying meaningful next steps. There was clear evidence of progression in children's learning journeys. Staff used floor books effectively to document experiences and capture children's voices, demonstrating a commitment to child led planning. While this approach reflects thoughtful practice, there is scope to further streamline recording methods and embed evaluation more consistently within the planning cycle. Management and staff agreed that strengthening this aspect would enhance the clarity and impact of planning, ensuring that all children are supported to reach their full potential.

## 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 facilitates

The environment was inviting, inspiring, and fun, reflecting a strong commitment to creating a high-quality learning space. Management and staff demonstrated a shared vision for continuous improvement, drawing inspiration from the Curiosity Approach and best practice guidance such as 'Space to Grow and Thrive'. Carefully considered displays that were created by both children and staff contributed to a cosy, stimulating atmosphere that fostered a sense of ownership and empowerment among the children. This thoughtful approach to the environment supported children's engagement, creativity, and emotional wellbeing.

Children moved freely between indoors and outdoors, accessing suitable clothing and boots. Children were meaningfully involved in shaping their play spaces. For example, staff identified the children's enjoyment of the junk modelling and as such worked with the children to create a junk modelling station. This approach communicated to children that their voices were valued. The furniture was appropriately sized for young children, with enough chairs and table space to support relaxed, sociable mealtimes and group activities.

We reviewed a range of risk assessments covering the outdoor and indoor environments, as well as outings. These assessments were thoughtfully developed, considering the age and stage of development of the children, and promoted a risk-benefit approach. This demonstrated a balanced understanding of the importance of enabling children to engage in challenging experiences while maintaining their safety. The risk assessments were regularly reviewed and updated, reflecting a proactive approach to health and safety and supporting children's independence, confidence, and ability to assess and manage risk for themselves.

Staff and children consistently followed good infection control practices. For example, we observed effective handwashing routines being carried out before eating, after personal care, and upon returning indoors from outdoor play. These practices reflected a strong understanding of hygiene protocols and contributed to minimising the risk of 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 well led

The manager and principal teacher was friendly, approachable, and engaged well with the inspection process. Staff told us they could approach the management team if they required support. One staff member told us 'Our manager supports us in our daily work. [They are] knowledgeable and sensitive to our needs and work.' This contributed to the development of a motivated staff team, who demonstrated a strong commitment to the children and families using the service. The management team promoted a positive and inclusive culture, underpinned by a clear and shared vision, values, and aims. The values were included, independent, and innovative, and had been thoughtfully reviewed in collaboration with families, ensuring they reflected the welcoming and supportive ethos of the setting. Staff demonstrated a strong understanding of these values and were actively embedding them into daily practice, contributing to a consistent and purposeful learning environment.

Regular meetings at all levels supported a reflective and collaborative staff culture. Monthly team meetings enabled staff to evaluate practice collectively and use their reflections to drive positive changes in outcomes and experiences for children and families. Daily debriefs after the children left provided opportunities for ongoing communication and responsiveness to children's needs. One staff member also participated in weekly whole-school meetings, strengthening links with the wider school community. In addition, joint meetings with other settings on the island facilitated the sharing of training and best practice, contributing to a culture of continuous improvement and professional development.

A robust auditing process had been embedded within the setting, with members of the senior leadership team regularly observing key aspects such as staff engagement, mealtimes, the environment, and interactions. Constructive feedback and clear action points were provided following observations, supporting continuous improvement. The recent visit from the local authority early years team further demonstrated the staff's capacity for improvement and responsiveness to external feedback, as evidenced by the actions taken following the visit.

Policies and procedures were aligned with current best practice guidance and were reviewed regularly, ensuring they remained relevant and effective in supporting high-quality provision.

Action plans for the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) setting had been developed and the whole school improvement plan had been created and shared with parents. To further strengthen this process, increased parental involvement in shaping an improvement plan for the ELC would be beneficial in creating partnerships with parents.

Management and staff maintained regular and meaningful contact with parents through a variety of channels, including welcoming parents at drop-off and pick-up times, end of term reports, stay and play sessions, and Bookbug events. Additional opportunities for engagement included a suggestion box, parents' evenings, and an open-door policy. These approaches fostered positive relationships, where children and families felt heard and respected. Children's rights were embedded throughout practice, reinforcing a culture of inclusion, respect, and partnership.

## 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

The staff team were warm, welcoming, and nurturing, contributing to a positive ethos throughout the nursery. Staff demonstrated compassion and enthusiasm in their interactions with both children and each other, creating a respectful and supportive environment. The ethos of the setting placed children at the centre, with staff treating each child as an individual. Staff worked well together, drawing on their diverse skills and knowledge to enhance the quality of interactions and experiences. Collaboration with wider early years services across the island further strengthened the team approach. This helped children and staff feel safe, secure, and valued, and supported strong relationships across the setting.

The nursery was appropriately staffed to meet the needs of the children. Staff were effectively deployed throughout the day, ensuring that children's needs were met in a timely and responsive manner. Staff breaks

and lunches were carefully organised to minimise disruption to the children's routines. As a result, the day ran smoothly, supporting continuity in children's care, play, and learning.

The principles of the SIMOA (Safe, Inspect, Monitor, Observe and Act) campaign were clearly embedded in practice, with visual symbols such as the poster and a toy elephant reinforcing the message that children's safety is a shared priority.

Staff spoke positively about training they had attended and were able to describe how it had influenced their practice and improved outcomes for children. Staff expressed the high value they placed on inclusive communication within the setting and considered how the environment could support this. For example, children could use the colour monster images to express how they were feeling. They demonstrated familiarity with current best practice guidance which underpinned their work. Management monitored staff training, including essential training such as child protection and first aid, to ensure all staff had the knowledge required to keep children safe.

All staff participated in an annual appraisal, which provided an opportunity for reflection, goal setting, and identification of training needs. This process supported continuous professional development and contributed to the overall quality of the provision. We discussed the benefits of aligning staff development with the standards of professional registration. All staff were registered with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). Staff's qualifications, registrations, and training helped them to better meet children's individual needs. This led to quality care and improved outcomes for children.

## 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

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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