

Agenda Item	9.
Report No	EDU/18/22

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Education

Date: 23 November 2022

Report Title: Early Years Curriculum and Learning Through Play

Report By: Executive Chief Officer, Education & Learning

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Early Learning and Childcare, or (ELC). ELC is a term used to describe the entire range of early education and early childcare services available in Scotland. The reason behind the terminology in ELC is to give emphasis to the idea that both learning and care are of equal importance in provision for very young children. This report provides members with an update on the provision of both curriculum and play in our ELC settings across Highlands to support the terminology adopted.
- 1.2 The report also provides members with an opportunity to understand better the quality of provision in Highland settings in more detail and inform necessary background information and note the direction of travel.
- 1.3 High quality ELC has an impact measurable over decades on outcomes ranging from learning and wellbeing to social inclusion and income. During the first few years of life children are growing key brain systems for thinking, attention, emotional regulation, language and social interaction; and laying the foundations for learning in all aspects of the curriculum.
- 1.4 The course of this development depends to a large extent on the environments, interactions, and relationships they encounter. With children spending more time in funded ELC settings, the quality of these becomes more important for them. This is so for all children, but particularly for those who are experiencing poverty or other adversities, high quality ELC provision can make a lifetime of difference.
- 1.5 The report is structured to provide a short reminder of the national consensus on what good practice is in ELC, followed by an account of actions and structures in Highland to support this, some information on impacts to date and recommendations for action.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are invited to:

- Acknowledge the plans for improvement and recovery and the benefits of play-based pedagogy in ELC and Early level primary;
- Acknowledge the improvement work taking place in ELC and the ambition for progress across all aspects of ELC provision;
- Note the direction of travel in early years and ELC practice, and;
- Support and endorse the ELC Vision recognising the communication and co-production between ELC providers, parents/carers and early years staff across Highland.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource

No resource implications, improvement and play based pedagogy delivering positive outcomes will be supported through the ELC Vision.

3.2 Legal

No legal implications.

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)

All communities benefit from improved practice and service delivery in ELC with over 200 ELC settings (LA, PVI and CM) across Highland.

3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever

No implications.

3.5 Risk

No implications.

3.6 Gaelic

Play based pedagogy and the improvement and recovery agenda sits across EM and GM ELC settings alike.

4. Overview

4.1 Play, Learning and Development

4.1.1 Play as Pedagogy

Walking into an ELC setting someone unaware of the nature of the sector could be forgiven for thinking all they could see is chaos. Children here and there doing all kinds of different things, many of them apparently without purpose, others moving about between indoors and out, and while they are outside making piles of leaves and then scattering them, or just getting covered in mud. Looking closer, this is in fact an environment well suited to the needs of the children. Early brain development and learning happens through children exploring a rich environment, supported by adults, trying things out and seeing what happens. What looks like a bewildering range of activity is a set of choices, trusting that children are drawn to, with guidance, the experiences they need to grow and develop. The apparently inconsequential conversations between children and adults not only add meaning and learning to what they do, but also develop deep brain systems that enable attention, memory, interaction and conceptual thinking. This is the picture recommended in the refreshed national practice guidance, [Realising the Ambition](#). From an adult

perspective, the small encounters of child and world build into the experiences and outcomes of the curriculum – for example as a child makes the piles of leaves, they start to notice different shapes and start a path of learning that turns into geometry.

4.1.2 **Play and resilience**

As well as building foundations for lifelong learning, play pedagogy supports the development of resilience in general and more specifically provides buffers for children against the impacts of poverty or other adversity. This is for the obvious reason that play is enjoyable, but more fundamentally because it allows the child to regulate their learning, the degree of risk they take, and to be drawn to the experiences they need – whether this be exploring the textures and comforts of soft materials for comfort or dragging crates around to reduce the adrenaline in their muscles. All this works if and only if there is also an environment of nurturing and sensitive relationships provided by the adults in the setting, who are themselves working in a positive environment.

This aspect of play is critical at present for many children and families. The impact of the pandemic continues to effect children's development and wellbeing and will take some time to diminish. At the same time, the cost-of-living crisis is impacting on what families can provide for their children with likely long term consequences. A visual summary of a review of evidence of the effects of adversity on lifetime outcomes is presented in **Appendix 1 Adversity Impacts Outcomes**. High quality ELC can be very effective in preventing or reducing these consequences. The following sections define high quality and set out actions and results to date in Highland.

4.2 **Standards for quality of provision**

There are at least four sources of information for quality of provision of ELC in Scotland. These were created at different times for different but also overlapping purposes and although they are mostly consistent with each other, this creates difficulties of both volume and interpretation for individual settings and practitioners.

4.2.1 It is hoped that the current review of inspection processes will provide both clarity and simplification with a single set of standards and agreed interpretations across scrutiny providers as well as robust standards to ensure inspection quality and consistency.

4.2.2 **The sources are:**

[Realising the Ambition](#). The national practice guidance from birth to end of early level.

[How Good is Our Early Learning and Childcare?](#) Education Scotland's inspection framework.

[Quality Framework for ELC Services](#). The Care Inspectorate's quality framework
[The National Standard for Early Learning and Childcare](#). The Scottish Government standard for ELC services to be commissioned

4.3 **Support for quality improvement**

4.3.1 Responsibility for setting consistent quality is held locally by the setting manager, in the case of partner providers, and the headteacher or delegated senior manager, in regard to schools. Support to self-evaluate and develop quality is provided by Early Years Education Officers (EYESO), Area Managers and in the future Collaborative Leads.

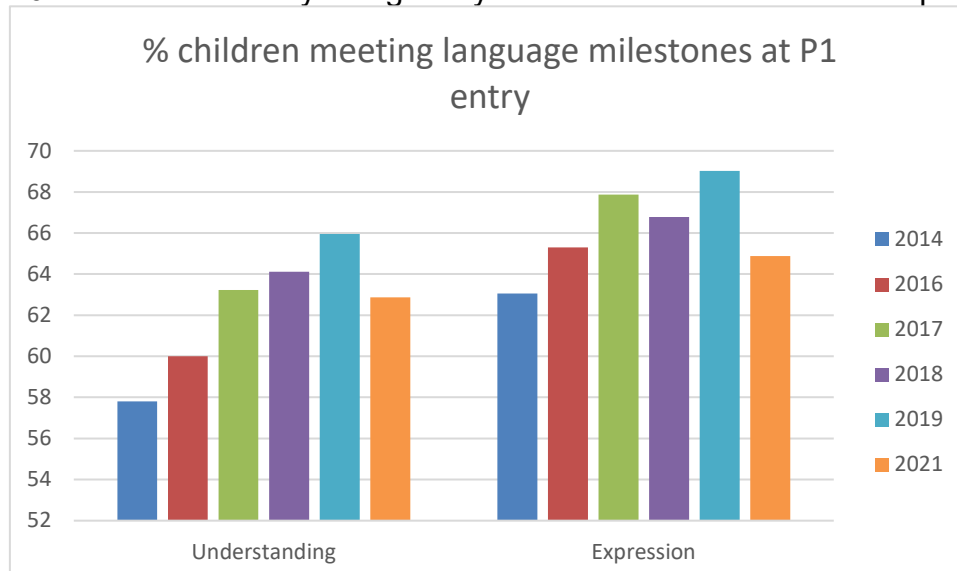
4.3.2 The EYESO team has worked since 2017 to develop tested tools to support managers in improving setting quality, ranging from evaluating the environment to monitoring the Profiles that contain the records of learning and planning for each child. Highland was a leader nationally during the pandemic in a general transition from large and inflexible one-off training approaches to professional development to more flexible and responsive “bitesize” offers, with follow up support, to implement learning in practice. EYESOs also provide professional development for settings to meet identified needs with respect to self-evaluation, planning, provision, or particular aspects of the curriculum. The current offer can be viewed [via this link](#). EYESOs also provide updates on guidance and good practice via the [ELC Highland Blog](#)

4.3.3 There has also been substantial collaborative work between education practitioners and allied health professionals to create materials and tools to support the delivery of particular aspects of the curriculum or support child development more generally. These include the Developmental Overviews, which support practitioners to monitor and plan for each child’s development in a way that is family friendly but also has the rigor of gold standard developmental screening tools. Concerns about development can be addressed early using the multi-agency resources on [Bumps2Bairns.com](#) which integrates seamlessly into staged intervention from specialist services. The Emerging Literacy materials (recommended nationally in [Education Scotland’s Equity Toolkit](#) to support the development of essential early skills and include a play-based learning Progression to allow practitioners to closely monitor progress and plan learning. A parallel progression for maths and numeracy is currently being tested for rollout later in the session. **Appendix 2**

4.4 **Data on Quality of Provision**

4.4.1 **Population level measures**

Highland is uniquely placed to assess the large-scale impact of our work and plan developments with fine resolution using the Developmental Overviews. These are used in settings in the course of everyday play to monitor and support children’s development from 2 years-old onwards as part of each child’s profile. Every year the Overviews are collated at the end of the session for children going on to school providing both an evaluation at population level of the impact of development work and a sense of where the gaps are for future improvement. The following graphs show part of this data, with year on year changes in children’s levels of language development (understanding and expression) over the last 7 years. Similar findings are available for other aspects of development (e.g., social or motor skills). The 2022 data is currently being analysed and will be available for reporting shortly.



Please note that data is not presented for 2015 as there were technical collection issues that potentially biased it and 2020 was the year when settings were closed so data could not be updated. The overall trend is of improvement over the years as the work described above has had impact. What is also apparent is the drop associated with the pandemic, which highlights the importance of continued efforts to improve play experiences in ELC settings and beyond. This drop is similar to that seen in emerging national and international data, for example in [reports from Public Health Scotland](#).

4.4.2 **National Standard measures**

In 2019, and again in 2021, the EYESO team conducted an audit of all settings to assess how many were confident they were meeting all aspects of the National Standard. This provides rich and detailed data to indicate where to focus efforts and support. The 2019 sweep showed a large number of settings were not fully confident in aspects such as family engagement, food provision, accessing professional learning, access to outdoor play, having an up to date framework to support learning and meeting equalities duties. These were all targeted by the EYESO team using developments as described above as well as bespoke support to individual settings.

4.4.3 **Qualitative data**

It is important to be clear that there is systematic work that is needed to bring all Highland ELC settings to their full potential for quality of provision. It is also important to be clear about current gaps and needs. However, this should not obscure two important points. Firstly, Highland is not alone in facing these challenges. Across the country, settings are struggling with the same headwinds as they seek to recover play after the pandemic and deal with long term issues. Secondly, Highland has many settings that have practice as good as, or better, than could be found anywhere else. In preparation for this report, four were sampled to provide an account of what they do, covering local authority and partner providers, as well as provision for young children and an inspection report on a setting with challenges in terms of physical environment. They are named here to celebrate their good practice, but it is important to state that there are many other settings across Highland including childminders and other partners providing great interactions and experiences.

The full accounts are presented in **Appendix 3** and are recommended for reading both in themselves and to provide context for the issues discussed more fully in this report. Some representative quotations follow:

Children benefitted from uninterrupted play allowing them to become engaged and engrossed. This increased children's happiness and engagement ... Children presented as happy and relaxed with staff. Staff took time to listen to children and effectively and skilfully used careful questioning to promote children's learning and extend children's thinking and learning. (Care Inspectorate report on Kilchoan PS)

At the heart of our 2-year-old nursery provision is relationship. This is a vital core element for working with our families for supporting recovery and holistic wellbeing. (Merkinch Family Centre)

There is no blanket approach in working with our families; we value each individual for who they are and their life story ... Staff know children well, respecting their 'voice', both verbal and non-verbal, using Makaton and using

Words-up strategies to support everyday learning in their play. (Merkinch Family Centre)

... having loose parts outdoors and time to explore is an amazing experience for children, some of whom have had limited access to outdoors. (Merkinch Family Centre)

We spend a significant amount of time ensuring that our learning environments (indoors and outdoors) are conducive to play based pedagogy. (Drakies PS)

Our children can access our literacy shed, fire pit, homemade natural obstacle courses, natural loose parts, mud kitchens, swings and soon to be erected hammock. (Drakies PS)

4-weekly planning cycles are in place ... underpinned by the 'Developmental overviews', learning pathways, individual targets, learning observations and 'Personal Care Plans'. (Drakies PS)

Our P1 and ELC staff work closely together to ensure that our play is as effective as possible ... Our P1 and ELC children also often share learning opportunities in the outdoor space. (Drakies PS)

This October CALA encouraged their settings to become 'Hallo-Green' to consider and share environmentally friendly activities with lots of opportunities for sensory play and learning for children and their families.

[See appendix 3 for full information]

Next Steps

4.5 A strategy to improve quality

A quality strategy to support all settings in Highland to gain and maintain the required level of quality needs to include 4 elements.

- A shared vision across Highland that can be adapted to reflect local communities
- Gathering and systematic proactive use of quality data
- Strengthened central and local quality improvement and quality assurance processes
- Refresh of professional learning offers

4.5.1 ELC Vision

A shared vision can help everyone in a complex sector to work together with a shared understanding of aims and approaches to meet local and national expectations. During the summer term of 2021 the Early Years team facilitated eight consultation sessions with almost 300 participants including setting staff and managers, parents, allied health professionals and local members to start to develop a Highland Vision for Early Years. Wider participation of parents was supported through a questionnaire supplied to settings, and parents also were asked to consult with their children before responding to gain their views.

Following thematic analysis of contributions, a draft vision was produced and tested in focus groups with practitioners and families to ensure it is rich enough to capture the key content but also concise enough to be useful. This is presented as a series of visual panels in **Appendix 4 ELC Vision**.

The Vision has been further tested in a range of ELC settings and is now ready for launch. A carefully designed series of launch events and follow up workshops will be in place from January to ensure maximum impact.

4.5.2 **Inspection and scrutiny**

The Care Inspectorate have increased their inspections as they return to increased scrutiny. Similarly, Education Scotland are beginning to engage again in inspections and scrutiny will focus initially on settings due for re-inspection.

Inspections provide externally validated information about quality but are to an extent retrospective. They do not help us identify and support settings which are fading in quality and will likely have difficulties on a future inspection.

4.5.3 **Data sources**

Part of all the quality standards is that settings engage in on-going, robust and collegiate self-evaluation. They are supported in this process by Early Years Education Support Officers. The “visit records” of EYESOs provide data as to what issues are common or shared across settings. In December 2019, the visit records for a single term were collated and analysed, providing rich qualitative insight into the improvement needs of settings. Intended to be a termly process to inform Area level planning for improvement and targeting, this was disrupted by the pandemic, but will be restored in line with quality systems improvements described below.

A second source of data are the inspection gradings and feedbacks from The Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland. These give a bulk picture across Highland of levels and patterns of quality in provision,

The third source of data is the National Standard for ELC. These are standards that all settings should meet in order to provide early learning and childcare. Whilst the bar is not set high enough to indicate high or very high quality, it at least provides a floor for what is acceptable. There is now in place an annual audit each autumn of all settings to allow objective scrutiny, risk assessment and planning. Data from the 2022 audit will be available for report early in the new year.

4.5.4 **Quality Systems**

There is no lack of data that can be used at individual setting, area or whole authority level to support the improvement of quality of provision. Making best use of this requires systematic processes at Area and whole Highland levels to support improvement and track progress over time, as well as to get ahead of reactive fire-fighting work, when inspections are poor or other issues arise.

The Head of ELC and Primary has begun a process of improvement of Area and central processes. A valuable day of self-evaluation across the sector was held in June 2022. There needs to be further work clarifying responsibilities and how different staff groups can work best together. Some possible ways forward include ensuring:

- Regular Area and central updating and analysis of quality data and issues arising
- Maximising the potential of joint working between EYESOs and collaborative leads
- Critical friend discussion at national level to support best practice
- ELC quality as a standing item on all relevant strategic and operational group meetings, including Head Teacher meetings
- Building on collaborative partnerships across services to continue consistent and seamless provision from pre-birth onwards

With respect to the latter point, the Integrated Children's Services Board has approved the creation of a liaison group between services to improve joint working for young children and families across health, education, and social care, and this will be taken forward by the Head of Health; Learning and Care should be of equal importance.

4.5.5 **Continuous Professional Learning**

Since 2018 substantial progress has been made in making the Continued Professional Learning (CLPL) offer for settings and practitioners more responsive, better based in self-evaluation and improvement efforts, and more reflective of up-to-date research and guidance.

Based on learning during the pandemic about what formats and approaches are most effective for CPL, and also responding to emerging data about the impact of the pandemic on children's outcomes and setting provision, these efforts need to be extended, including

- Developing a clearer process for commissioning and choosing CPL based in setting self-evaluations and improvement planning
- Setting up quality systems (see above) that provide advance intelligence of what CPL is needed across Highland and in localities
- Continuing to develop a multi-agency coaching/collaborative approach to improvement with accountabilities for staff and managers

4.5.6 **Recovering Play**

There is anecdotal evidence of a national picture whereby ELC provisions have not fully recovered from the impact of public health measures during the pandemic. For example, children may be being offered fewer messy experiences, or trips out, or the choices of equipment may be more restricted, or snack become more formalised. EYESO quality support visits are highlighting some of these issues locally and at the last in-service day 200 early years practitioners attended a self-evaluation and support event to focus on these issues. As a result, during this session a Recovering Play programme will be offered with a mix of weekly blog posts, support tools and trainings to help settings identify gaps in the experiences they offer and work to address these. Settings will be able to choose one of three modules to work on, with the choices being guided by findings from the National Standard audit data:

- Refreshing your setting vision and learning framework
- Developmentally appropriate experiences
- Positive relationships and behaviour

5. Next Steps

- 5.1
- The Highland Vision for ELC following extensive engagement, collaboration and co-construction will be launched with all stakeholders in January 2023
 - Officers will work closely with settings and practitioners to carefully take forward the recommendations from the consultation of inspections for ELC settings
 - The strategy to improve quality as outlined in section 4.5 will be implemented as a priority
 - Up to date, researched based continued professional learning will be used to strengthen support for settings and practitioners with a focus on play pedagogy and resilience
 - Data from the National Standard ELC audit will be shared with all practitioners and settings to help to inform area level planning for improvement and target setting

Designation: Executive Chief Officer – Education & Learning

Date: 10 November 2022

Author: James McTaggart, Educational Psychologist
Hayley Brown, Senior Manager Early Years

Appendices: Appendix 1 – EY Curriculum Adversity Outcomes
Appendix 2 – Words Up
Appendix 3 – Examples
Appendix 4 – ELC Vision

A literature review of the links between early adversity & deprivation

and later outcomes

Part One –
The Problems

- Parenting is tough anyway, but
- Less money
 - Greater social isolation
 - Chronic stressors
 - Housing quality
 - Complexity of life
 - Mental health
 - Physical health
 - Experiences of childhood

To develop as well as they can, children

Play and stimulation, but

- Fewer recreational options/facilities
- Reduced language exposure
- Less frequent literacy-related activities
- Fewer stimulating experiences
- Reduced expectations

Sensitive and Reflective Care, but

- Lower parental responsiveness
- Punitive or harsh parenting
- Less scaffolding interaction in play
- Fewer conversations

Moderate stress and recovery, but

- Higher incidence of prenatal stress
- More and greater traumas
- Chronic stress
- Chaotic lives/lack of routine

Good physical health, but

- Higher exposure to smoke
- Poor nutrition
- Low birth weight/preterm
- More respiratory illness

The more of each of these you have at school entry, the better you will do at

- Executive function
 - Working memory
 - Attention switching
 - Response inhibition
 - Cognitive flexibility
- Emergent literacy
 - Concepts of print
 - Phonological awareness
- Language & Social skills
 - Vocabulary
 - Pragmatics
 - Turn-taking
 - sharing
- Self-regulation (a.k.a behaviour)
 - Knowing what to do
 - Understanding of routines
 - Appropriate arousal levels
 - Self-soothing

(Many of the key effects of deprivation

Words Up

The Words Up project is a long-term collaboration between Speech and Language Therapists and educators to develop tools and information that help EYC to maintain the quality of their interactions and the language learning environments that they plan for the children. Examples of the materials can be seen on this link.

Speech and Language Therapy staff are available to support through coaching and modelling to ensure confidence levels and understanding of the use of the Words Up strategies are maintained. For example, a local school sought to develop the language learning and communication development of all the children in the nursery setting, by ensuring good collaborative planning and joint working with the ELC and the Speech and Language Therapy Support Practitioner. This was done through planned and supported coaching over a period, with governance and ultimate ownership for this held by the SMT within the school. A monitoring tool was used to help staff self-monitor their own progress and development. The next steps of this project are to complete a sustainability tool - a guide to help the SMT/Quality Lead maintain the standard of interactions and the standard of the environment and routine required through mentoring and induction of new staff, along with their current supervision. It would be hoped that in time, the tool/document would be used more widely once this piece of work is completed.

CALA – great example of learning through play for one of the most enjoyed



Halogreen
Parents(1).pdf

celebrations

See these links for photos of the Halogreen play and learning

[Beechwood Early Learning and Childcare - Care and Learning Alliance](https://www.careandlearningalliance.co.uk/our-services/early-years/early-years-groups/cradlehall-elc/)
<https://www.careandlearningalliance.co.uk/our-services/early-years/early-years-groups/cradlehall-elc/>

Kilchoan – despite the old premises which bring considerable challenges, Kilchoan had a great inspection from Care Inspectorate – well done to staff and management, despite the challenges this feedback demonstrates the power of interactions and relationships and play.

1.3 Play and Learning Children were actively leading their play and learning throughout the day. They were provided with play and learning opportunities that impacted positively on their development, health, wellbeing, and happiness. Children benefitted from uninterrupted play allowing them to become engaged and engrossed. This increased children's happiness and engagement. Children were supported to learn and develop through their play. Planning approaches were child led and responsive. Children experienced both spontaneous and planned opportunities. They were offered exciting, stimulating, and interesting experiences which promoted curiosity, imagination, and collaborative play. Children were supported and encouraged to explore, experiment, be creative, take risks and problem solve. The learning opportunities impacted positively on children's health and wellbeing and contributed to the development of numeracy, literacy, and language skills. Children presented as happy and relaxed with staff. Staff took time to listen to children and effectively and skilfully used careful questioning to promote children's learning and extend children's thinking, learning and Inspection report Inspection report for Kilchoan Primary School Nursery page 4 of 9 play opportunities. The children's successes and achievements were recognised and celebrated, helping them develop a sense of pride, build resilience, and support their self-esteem.

Family Centre Inverness

Play pedagogy and good practice in recovery and supporting wellbeing

At the heart of our [eligible] 2- year-old nursery provision within the Family Centre – Inverness, is relationship. This is a vital core element for working with our families for supporting recovery and holistic wellbeing. We know that the focus cannot be on the child in isolation, as everything and everyone in a child’s life, particularly those who are closest, have a huge impact, either negative or positive.

There is no blanket approach in working with our families; we value everyone for who they are and their life story. After Covid, and now with our recent move into our amazing new building, there have been many changes, both big and small, for children, families, and staff. However, we have developed a real sense of community, offering a warm, welcoming, nurturing environment (physical and social) for all.

Our children come from various places outside of Scotland, including Ukraine, the Philippians,



Poland and Bangladesh. Good two-way-communication is an essential element for developing good relationships with families, who have often found themselves in extremely challenging situations. We want to make families feel comfortable with even little things like having dual language books in the nursery for when they come in for ‘Stay and Play’ sessions and in our children’s library.

Staff know children well, respecting their ‘voice’, both verbal and non-verbal, using Makaton and using Words-up strategies to support everyday learning in their play. Children’s spaces inside are cosy, calming, with natural resources, and loose parts to encourage children’s creativity. Similarly, having loose parts outdoors and time to explore is an amazing experience for children, some of whom have had limited access to outdoors.

We look forward to an exciting new chapter for all our families and staff at the Family Centre.

Drakies ELC and Primary

We are committed to and fully invested in play-based pedagogy in our Early Years at Drakies and are delighted that our setting, care and play & learning were identified as very good by the Care Inspectorate last month.

We spend a significant amount of time ensuring that our learning environments (indoors and outdoors) are conducive to play based pedagogy. Our environments are decorated in neutral colours which promote a nurturing, calm and homely environment. We have invested in furniture over recent years to ensure that the layout of our learning spaces supports children's independence, ensuring that all resources are always easily accessible. Almost all resources are natural and open-ended which supports the development of skills such as curiosity, problem solving and imagination. We provide a wide range of activities indoors and outdoors, including messy play, painting, sensory play, role play and arts and crafts.

Our outdoors environment features heavily and in our ELC we ensure that children have 'free flow' access to the outdoors at almost all points in the day and in all weathers. Our children can access our literacy shed, fire pit, homemade natural obstacle courses, natural loose parts, mud kitchens, swings and soon to be erected hammock. Our experiences provide appropriate challenge and support children to develop skills in literacy, numeracy creativity and curiosity. We also provide many opportunities for children to participate in risky play and encourage and support our children to assess the risks themselves.

4-weekly planning cycles are in place to plan for our very good play-based learning opportunities. Our planning is underpinned by the 'Developmental overviews', learning pathways, individual targets, learning observations and 'Personal Care Plans'. We are flexible and ensure that 'in the moment planning' features heavily. Planning floor books are in place to capture children's thoughts, interests and to plan and/or evidence our play experiences.

Our P1 and ELC staff work closely together to ensure that our play is as effective as possible. For example, last session ELC staff worked in P1 where possible to develop their understanding of how we develop phonological awareness through play and then put some of the ideas into practice in the ELC. Our P1 and ELC children also often share learning opportunities in the outdoor space.

We would welcome anyone to Drakies who would like to see our play-based pedagogy in action.

Our Highland Ambition – making the Highlands the best place to grow up



"Start with the child"

"High quality early years provision promotes children's development and learning and, in the longer term, enhances their educational and life chances"

"Each child's needs should be at the centre of how we think about and plan for their unique development"

"What do the children's actions, emotions and words tell you about what they require from you and others?"

"The key part of the environment for children is the human, social environment of positive nurturing interactions"

"Understanding the complexities, diversities and cultural differences of individual families and how this can impact each child is essential"

"Children flourish when playing outdoors in all weathers. Feeling sun, wind, rain, snow and ice first hand is important as it connects us as human beings to the planet we live on"

"As the child's first educators, parents and carers are key partners in supporting their child's learning"

"We know how babies and children learn best in environments that inspire them to be curious and creative"

"To give our youngest the best we must strive to be at our best. And to do this it's important for us as a workforce to look after ourselves and each other"



Realising the ambition: Being Me

National practice guidance for early years in Scotland

"The role of the adult is a delicate balance of supporting, enriching and proposing on the one hand, and keeping back to give the children space and time to build their own ideas on the other"

Our Highland Ambition – that every child in our early learning and childcare settings can say

"I feel part of things and have friends that I like to play with"

"We play and talk outdoors a lot with interesting things to do and see"

"Adults listen and talk to me, are interested in what I say and act on it"

"When we are busy playing, sometimes we carry on and leave the next thing for later"

"I'm helped to do what I'm interested in and to find out about new things too"

"Adults play and talk with me, and know how to get involved in my play"

"I feel happy and welcomed when I come to play"

"I get to try things out, have a go, get messy or silly, or do things that feel a bit scary at first"

"I know who I can go to if I need help or am not feeling ok"

"I know what is going to happen and when"

"We go out and about and have interesting walks and visits outside the setting"

"I know the adults and they know and understand me"

"There are always lots of fun and interesting things for me to choose to do"

"Snacks and meals are tasty and fun, and we can sit down and chat with the adults too"

"This feels like 'our setting' where we have choices about what happens and what it is like"

Our Highland Ambition – that all staff in our early learning and childcare settings can say

"We ensure everyone, children, families and staff, feels valued and included"

Every family can trust us to do our very best for them and their children

"We make sure we know and understand our children, families and the community around us"

We make time for meaningful interactions with children, parents and each other

"We recognise each individual and adapt our approaches to match their needs and overcome any difficulties"

As a team we are forward thinking and willing to try new things, then reflect on progress and improvement

We know each member of the staff team has their own skills and we encourage each other to use and develop them

We are supported to access relevant professional learning to develop our skills and knowledge

We look outwards and develop opportunities to work collaboratively with other settings and professionals throughout Highland and beyond

All of us are involved in decision making and feel a sense of purpose and belonging

We work closely with all our Early Level colleagues to develop shared experiences and seamless transitions

Our Highland Ambition – that each family in our early learning and childcare settings can say

"We see a joined-up approach between ELC and schools. They understand our children's development and learning through play"

"Our children feel like the setting is a home from home and are very settled and happy"

"We feel welcome and wanted in our setting, whatever our race, gender, sexuality or other circumstances"

"If there are any issues to discuss, setting staff are kind and raise them in a positive way"

"Staff in our setting really know and value our children as individual people"

"We hear lots of good news about our children's learning as well as about any issues"

"We have regular updates on our children's progress and what they are interested in"

"Our ELC setting listens carefully to our needs and adapts as flexibly as possible"

"Our setting shares some great ideas with us for learning through play, and they listen to our ideas from home too"

"Setting staff notice if we are not comfortable (e.g., with meet and greets) and find other ways to engage that work for us"

"We are involved in planning any changes or transitions and feel our voices are heard and acted on"