

Edinburgh Early Years Standards & Quality Report 2025-26 Improvement Plan 2026-27



Name of Setting	Willow Den at Spartans
Vision, Values and Aims	<u>Vision</u> We see our nursery as a place where children develop respect, resilience, and a commitment to becoming caretakers of the earth, guided by their own curiosity and the wonders of the environment. <u>Values</u> • Connection with Nature: Spending time in nature enriches children’s lives through exploration and discovery. • Responsibility for Our Planet: We instil environmental stewardship, teaching children that their actions impact the world. • Community and Belonging: We foster a sense of belonging where children, families, and staff are connected by shared values and a love for the outdoors. <u>Aims</u> • Create Lasting Bonds with Nature: To offer experiences that allow children to form deep, personal connections with the natural world. • Inspire Eco-Awareness from an Early Age: Through nature-based play, children learn about sustainability and caring for their environment. • Build Resilient, Compassionate Individuals: By supporting outdoor play, we help children grow into confident, mindful, and respectful individuals.

Context	<i>Willow Den at Spartans is a fully outdoor 24-place nursery located within Ainslie Park Stadium, primarily serving families from North Edinburgh. Since opening in January 2022, we have continued to develop our nature-based provision, with a strong focus on children's wellbeing, outdoor learning, communication, and positive relationships with families.</i> <i>Following our Care Inspectorate inspection, where we received 'Good' grades across all key areas, we have continued to build on the strengths identified, including our nurturing ethos, strong team approach, and the quality of relationships with children and families. We have also continued to work on the areas identified for improvement, including supporting children's independence during routines, strengthening numeracy within the outdoor environment, improving quality assurance processes, and ensuring planning and staff deployment remain responsive to children's needs.</i> <i>Our increase to 24 children per day is now embedded within the service. This has allowed us to welcome more families while continuing to maintain the small, nurturing and child-centred feel of Willow Den. Our holiday club provision has also continued to develop, offering outdoor play and learning opportunities for children beyond nursery age during school holiday periods. As part of our commitment to reducing barriers to attendance and participation, we continue to provide high-quality outdoor clothing kits for children attending two or more days per week, and offer these at a significantly reduced cost for children attending one day. This helps to ensure that all children are able to fully access and enjoy outdoor learning, regardless of family circumstances.</i> <i>We have continued to invest in our outdoor environment, developing spaces that support curiosity, creativity, risk assessment, sensory play and child-led learning. This includes focused areas such as tool play, block play, mud kitchen provision, quieter cosy spaces, and areas for imaginative and collaborative play.</i> <i>The staff team has continued to develop, with a focus on outdoor pedagogy, individual leadership, and reflective practice. Recently promoting one of our team members to Senior Outdoor Practitioner, which has strengthened day-to-day leadership and provided additional support for both the team and management. We continue to make use of experienced bank staff to support consistency across the service, and remain mindful of future staffing needs as demand for places continues to grow.</i>
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Please self-evaluate the 5 identified quality indicators from Quality Improvement Framework for ELC , *linking the impact of the improvement priorities from 2025-26 to each within the first column. Please ensure a qualitative and or quantitative statement for each theme within the quality indicator.				
*What have we done?	How well are you doing? What's working well for your learners?	How do you know? What evidence do you have of positive impact on learners?	What are you going to do now? What are your improvement priorities in this area? (Identify a few next steps linked directly to progress and impact for this area/priority)	Evaluate using the six-point scale from the Quality Improvement Framework?
Leadership- Leadership of continuous improvement: Pedagogical leadership; Leadership and professional learning; Planning and continuous improvement				
- Embedded the expansion to 24 children and reviewed daily routines, deployment and use of spaces to keep children safe and well supported. - Introduced a Senior Outdoor EYP role and continued to build shared leadership through keyworker responsibility, staff-led areas of provision and reflective team discussions. - Reviewed the 2025-26 improvement priorities through staff meetings, supervision, planning discussions, environmental reviews and informal quality assurance activity. - Worked with Care Inspectorate around variation, toilet provision, handwashing, contingency space and safe outdoor operating arrangements. - Continued professional learning and mentoring around outdoor pedagogy, child protection, inclusion, risk-benefit practice and support for children with additional support needs.	- The staff team has a strong shared commitment to outdoor learning, nurture and children's rights. - Leadership is becoming more distributed, with practitioners taking more ownership of areas of practice and daily decision-making. - Self-evaluation is honest and increasingly linked to children's experiences, but systems are not yet consistently formalised or evidenced across the year. - Staffing changes and operational pressures have slowed some planned improvements, particularly around structured QA and moderation.	- Care Inspectorate grades remain Good across all four key questions from the last inspection. - Staff meeting discussions, supervision notes, planning records and environmental reviews show ongoing reflection and responsive change. - Variation evidence and communication with Care Inspectorate demonstrate active leadership of premises and safety arrangements. - Parent feedback and daily conversations show families value the relationships, outdoor ethos and communication within the setting. - Children are settled, confident in the outdoor environment and familiar with daily routines, boundaries and safety expectations.	- Embed a clear annual Quality Assurance calendar with named leads, dates, evidence sources and follow-up actions. - Use the new Quality Improvement Framework more consistently in staff meetings, planning reviews and supervision. - Strengthen distributed leadership so all practitioners have a defined role in improvement work, not only senior staff. - Link self-evaluation more clearly to measurable impact for children and families.	Good
Children play and learn- Curriculum: Curriculum rationale and design; Continuity and progression in the curriculum; Partnerships; Skills for life and learning				
- Continued to provide a fully outdoor, nature-based curriculum shaped by children's interests, seasonal change, risk-benefit play and the local woodland environment. - Developed and used learning zones such as woodwork/tool use, mud kitchen, block and loose parts, cosy/rest spaces, campfire/cooking and imaginative play areas. - Used floorbooks, learning journals, photographs and discussion with children to capture interests and extend learning.	- Children are highly engaged by the outdoor curriculum and confidently use the environment for investigation, problem-solving, role play and physical challenge. - The curriculum is responsive and meaningful, with strong links to wellbeing, language, independence and social development. - Children's voice is visible in floorbooks and daily planning, although progression across curriculum areas is not always mapped clearly enough over time.	- Floorbooks, photographs and learning journals show child-led enquiries, seasonal projects and extended periods of play. - Observation records show children developing confidence in outdoor skills, managing risk, collaborating and using rich language in context. - Parent comments and informal feedback show families recognise children's confidence, resilience and enjoyment outdoors. - Transition conversations and school-leaver	- Refresh and write down our curriculum rationale so it clearly explains why outdoor learning matters at Willow Den and how children progress through it. - Map progression in early literacy, numeracy, STEM, wellbeing and skills for life through everyday outdoor experiences. - Use the environment more deliberately for planned small-group learning while keeping the child-led nature of provision. - Increase family and community voice in shaping curriculum development.	Good

• Offered wider experiences including local walks, beach/coastal exploration, campfire cooking, celebrations, transition activities, graduation and holiday club provision. • Maintained strong emphasis on sustainability, caring for the site, noticing wildlife and children taking responsibility within the environment.	• Numeracy, STEM and cultural/community links are developing but need to be more deliberately planned and evidenced.	information show children leaving with strong independence, curiosity and social confidence.		
Children play and learn- Learning and Teaching and Assessment: Children's learning and engagement; Interactions to support learning; Planning and assessment; Tracking and monitoring				
• Continued to develop responsive, in-the-moment planning through floorbooks, keyworker observations, daily reflection and children's interests. • Used learning journals and developmental overviews to capture progress and share learning with families. • Supported practitioners to notice significant learning in outdoor play and to extend children's thinking through conversation, modelling, questioning and shared problem-solving. • Worked with external professionals to adapt strategies for children who require additional support, including communication, sensory, regulation and transition supports. • Reviewed planning and deployment when weather, staffing or individual children's needs required changes.	• Interactions are warm, respectful and responsive. Children are confident to approach adults, ask questions, seek help and share ideas. • Children show sustained engagement in meaningful outdoor play, particularly when learning follows their interests and real experiences. • Practitioners know their key children well, but the quality and consistency of recorded observations, assessment and next steps varies. • Tracking is improving but does not yet give us a strong enough whole-setting overview of progress, gaps and targeted impact.	• Learning journals, floorbooks and planning records show examples of child-led learning and adult extension. • Individual support plans, personal plans and multi-agency records evidence tailored strategies for children with additional support needs. • Staff discussions show increasing confidence in identifying children's interests and next steps. • Parent conversations and journal feedback show families value being able to see children's learning and development.	• Agree a simple observation and planning framework that helps staff identify significant learning, skills, next steps and impact. • Introduce termly moderation of observations, journals and planning as part of the QA calendar. • Develop termly progress meetings to look at individual children, targeted groups and children who may need additional support. • Strengthen use of data and professional judgement to evidence progress in communication, early literacy, numeracy and wellbeing.	Good
Children are supported to achieve- Wellbeing, Inclusion and Equality: Positive relationships and wellbeing; Universal support; Identifying and assessing learning needs and targeted support; Inclusion and equality				
• Maintained a nurturing keyworker approach with strong daily communication with families and regular review of personal plans. • Strengthened multi-agency working with health visitors, speech and language therapy, ASL services, educational psychology and social work where appropriate. • Adapted routines, environments and staffing to support children with additional support needs, medical needs, communication differences and sensory or regulation needs. • Used GIRFEC wellbeing indicators, chronologies and individual planning to identify concerns and respond early. • Continued to reduce barriers to participation through outdoor clothing support, flexible settling, transition support and practical family conversations.	• Children are known well by adults and relationships are a clear strength of the setting. • Children with additional support needs are increasingly supported through targeted strategies and partnership working. • The team is caring and responsive, but the increasing complexity of need means staff require more consistent training, shared strategies and protected time to review impact. • Independence in routines is improving but needs to be planned more consistently, particularly around mealtimes, toileting, clothing and self-care.	• Personal plans, chronologies, individual support plans, risk assessments and meeting notes evidence responsive support. • Feedback from families and partner professionals shows strong relationships and willingness to work together around children's needs. • Observations show children building confidence in routines, friendships, emotional expression and physical independence. • Transition records and school information show children are supported with next steps and changes.	• Develop a more consistent approach to tracking targeted supports and reviewing whether they are making a difference. • Provide focused CPD around additional support needs, trauma-informed practice, communication, emotional regulation and care experience. • Use the Care Experience Evaluation Tool to check our systems and identify any further actions. • Increase planned opportunities for independence in daily routines and review progress through observations and family feedback.	Very good

Children are supported to achieve- Safeguarding and Child Protection: Culture of safety and wellbeing; Legislation, policy and guidance in practice: Empowerment of staff and children				
• Maintained child protection and safeguarding as a standing priority through induction, supervision, daily discussions and support for staff when concerns are raised. • Used chronologies, incident records, wellbeing concerns and GIRFEC processes to record, monitor and act on information. • Reviewed risk assessments, daily registers, headcounts, ratios, toileting arrangements, medication and allergy information, and extreme weather/contingency procedures. • Liaised with families and partner agencies where there were concerns about children's wellbeing or family circumstances. • Supported children to understand boundaries, risk, safe movement around the site and the importance of telling an adult if they are hurt, worried or need help.	• The safeguarding culture is strong. Staff understand that keeping children safe is everyone's responsibility and are confident to raise concerns. • Children are supervised well within a challenging outdoor environment and staff respond quickly to changing weather, site conditions and children's needs. • Records are in place and generally effective, but we need a more formal annual audit cycle to ensure consistency across all documentation. • Bank and covering staff require clear, consistent safeguarding induction and access to essential information.	• Child protection training records, staff meeting notes and supervision discussions evidence ongoing focus. • Chronologies, incident records, risk assessments, medication records and personal plans show safeguarding systems in use. • Care Inspectorate feedback from the last inspection recognised positive relationships, staff knowledge and children's wellbeing. • Daily practice shows children are familiar with safety routines, boundaries and adult support.	• Introduce a planned annual audit of chronologies, personal plans, incidents, medication/allergy records and risk assessments. • Refresh safeguarding induction for bank and covering staff, including site-specific outdoor risks and escalation routes. • Review Child Protection and Safeguarding policy in August 2026 in line with the QA calendar. • Continue to support staff confidence in separating fact from assumption and recording concerns clearly and chronologically.	Very good

Date of last Care Inspection: November 2024	Evaluation- please indicate overall for each question
Quality Indicator:	
How good is our Care, Play and Learning?	4 - Good
How good is our Setting?	4 - Good
How good is our Leadership?	4 - Good
How good is our Staff Team?	4 - Good

ELC- Improvement Plan 2026-27

Improvement Priority 1:	Embed quality assurance, tracking and distributed leadership to improve outcomes for children			
Person(s) Responsible:	Sandi Ferry Martin, Senior Outdoor EYP and all Willow Den practitioners			
Next Steps from S&Q report:	• Embed a clear annual QA calendar with named leads and follow-up actions. • Strengthen tracking and moderation so children's progress is visible over time. • Build shared leadership so all practitioners contribute to improvement activity.			
Links to QI from Quality Improvement Framework:	Leadership: Leadership and management of staff and resources, Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment, Leadership of continuous improvement Children play and learn: Playing, learning and developing, Curriculum, Learning, teaching and assessment Children are supported to achieve: Wellbeing, inclusion and equality, Children's progress, Safeguarding and Child Protection			
Key Issue/Challenge (Why?)	What will solve the issue/challenge (What?)	Implementation activities (How,when and who?)	Outcomes (What does success look like?)	Measurements (How will you know?)
Self-evaluation and QA activity happens regularly, but it is not yet consistently planned, evidenced or used to show measurable impact for children. Operational pressures during 2025-26 affected the pace of this work. We need a simpler and more consistent whole-team system.	• A populated QA calendar with dates, leads, evidence sources and review points. • Termly progress meetings using observations, journals, personal plans, children's voice and family feedback. • Shared moderation of learning journals, observations, planning and targeted supports. • Clear leadership roles linked to staff strengths and PRD/supervision.	• Aug 2026: agree QA calendar, staff roles and evidence folders. Lead: Manager/Senior. • Sept-Oct 2026: baseline sampling of learning journals, planning and personal plans; identify priority children/groups. • Each term: progress meetings, moderation session and QA review against improvement priorities. • Monthly: one focused staff meeting item linked to QIF challenge questions and improvement evidence. • Jan and May 2027: evaluate progress and adjust actions.	• All practitioners understand their role in QA and can evidence how their work supports children's progress. • Children's progress in communication, early literacy, numeracy, wellbeing and independence is more visible over time. • Targeted supports are planned, reviewed and adapted more consistently. • Self-evaluation leads to clear action rather than sitting as separate paperwork.	• QA calendar completed and reviewed monthly. • Termly learning journal/planning samples and moderation records. • Progress meeting notes showing next steps and reviewed impact. • Personal plan and chronology audit findings. • Staff confidence feedback in Sept, Jan and May. • Parent/carer and children's voice evidence linked to improvement priorities.
Evaluations/ Progress				
January 2027				
May 2027				

Improvement Priority 2:	Strengthen outdoor curriculum pathways, with a focus on progression in language, numeracy, STEM and skills for life			
Person(s) Responsible:	Sandi Ferry Martin, Senior Outdoor EYP and keyworker team			
Next Steps from S&Q report:	• Refresh Willow Den's curriculum rationale and make progression through outdoor learning clearer. • Strengthen planned and responsive opportunities for literacy, numeracy, STEM and problem-solving. • Use the woodland, base camp, Dugout/contingency space and wider site more deliberately for planned learning.			
Links to QI from Quality Improvement Framework:	Leadership: Leadership of continuous improvement Children thrive and develop in quality spaces: Children experience high quality spaces Children play and learn: Playing, learning and developing, Curriculum, Learning, teaching and assessment Children are supported to achieve: Children's progress,			
Key Issue/Challenge (Why?)	What will solve the issue/challenge (What?)	Implementation activities (How,when and who?)	Outcomes (What does success look like?)	Measurements (How will you know?)
The outdoor curriculum is a strength and children are highly engaged. However, progression across curriculum areas is not always captured clearly enough, especially in numeracy, STEM and skills for life. We need to show how children's everyday outdoor play builds knowledge, skills and confidence over time.	• A clear curriculum rationale explaining the Willow Den approach to outdoor learning. • Progression prompts for literacy, numeracy, STEM, wellbeing, risk, independence and sustainability. • A balance of responsive child-led learning and intentional small-group experiences. • Staff CPD and peer discussion focused on high-quality adult interactions outdoors.	• Aug-Sept 2026: review current curriculum statement with staff, children and families. • Term 1: map key outdoor spaces against learning possibilities and progression prompts. • Term 2: practitioner sprints focused on numeracy/STEM and communication in outdoor play. • Term 3: review floorbooks, observations and children's voice to evaluate progress and identify next steps. • Ongoing: use family feedback and community links to broaden experiences.	• Children experience rich outdoor learning that supports curiosity, problem-solving, communication, numeracy and resilience. • Staff can explain the learning taking place outdoors and identify progression more confidently. • Floorbooks and journals show clearer links between children's interests, adult support and developing skills. • Families have a clearer understanding of the value and impact of outdoor learning.	• Curriculum rationale completed and shared with staff/families. • Planning and floorbook audits show clearer links to progression prompts. • Observation samples show increased evidence of language, numeracy, STEM and independence skills. • Children's voice gathered through floorbooks, photos, talking mats or consultation boards. • Parent/carer feedback through question of the month and annual evaluation.
Evaluations/ Progress				
January 2027				
May 2027				

Improvement Priority 3:	Deepen inclusive practice, wellbeing support and family partnership so every child can participate fully			
Person(s) Responsible:	Sandi Ferry Martin, Senior Outdoor EYP, keyworkers and partner professionals			
Next Steps from S&Q report:	• Make targeted support and review processes more consistent. • Strengthen staff confidence around ASN, communication, regulation, trauma-informed practice and care experience. • Increase meaningful stakeholder engagement with children, families and partners.			
Links to QI from Quality Improvement Framework:	Leadership: Learning, teaching and assessment Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment, Leadership of continuous improvement Children play and learn: Playing, learning and developing, Curriculum, Learning, teaching and assessment Children are supported to achieve: Nurturing care and support, Wellbeing, inclusion and equality, Children's progress, Safeguarding and Child Protection			
Key Issue/Challenge (Why?)	What will solve the issue/challenge (What?)	Implementation activities (How, when and who?)	Outcomes (What does success look like?)	Measurements (How will you know?)
Children's needs across the setting are increasingly diverse. Relationships are strong and staff are responsive, but targeted strategies, evidence of impact and shared approaches need to be more consistent. Families and partners should be more clearly involved in evaluating what is working.	• Consistent review cycle for personal plans, individual support strategies and transition planning. • Focused CPD on ASN, trauma-informed practice, communication, emotional regulation and inclusive outdoor routines. • Use of the Care Experience Evaluation Tool to check systems and identify actions. • A stakeholder engagement approach using children's voice, family feedback and partner input.	• Aug-Sept 2026: review personal plans, medical/allergy information, ASN supports and care experience responsibilities. • Termly: keyworker progress meetings for children requiring targeted support, with evidence gathered from journals, observations, family views and partner feedback. • Each term: focused staff development linked to inclusion and wellbeing. • Ongoing: question of the month/moment linked to improvement priorities and children's consultation through floorbooks or visual boards. • Apr-June 2027: transition reviews and evaluation with families and receiving schools/settings.	• Children with additional support needs receive consistent, reviewed and well-evidenced support. • Children show increased confidence, independence and participation in daily routines and outdoor learning. • Families feel listened to and can see how their views shape support and improvement. • Staff feel more confident and consistent in using inclusive strategies and recording impact.	• Personal plan, chronology, medical/allergy and support strategy audits. • Termly review records showing actions, impact and next steps. • Staff CPD records and confidence surveys. • Children's voice and family feedback linked to support and transitions. • Multi-agency minutes and transition documentation where applicable. • Care Experience Evaluation Tool actions completed/reviewed.
Evaluations/ Progress				
January 2027				
May 2027				

Three Year ELC Plan for Improvement 2026-2029			
Quality Improvement Framework area / quality indicator focus	2026-2027 Year 1: establish and embed	2027-2028 Year 2: develop and deepen	2028-2029 Year 3: sustain and evidence impact
Leadership Leadership and management of staff and resources Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment Leadership of continuous improvement	- Embed QA calendar, named leads and evidence folders. - Termly progress meetings and moderation. - Practitioner leadership roles linked to supervision/PRD.	- Use QA evidence to drive practitioner enquiry. - Strengthen mentoring, induction and deployment reviews. - Build shared ownership of improvement.	- Sustain shared self-evaluation. - Use trends from QA, staff feedback and children/family voice. - Share effective outdoor practice with partners.
Children thrive and develop in quality spaces Children experience high quality spaces	- Map woodland, base camp, Dugout/contingency space and routines for safety, learning, access and independence. - Review risk-benefit, shelter, toileting, handwashing and weather procedures.	- Develop inclusive zones for regulation, creativity, tool play, construction, STEM, literacy and numeracy. - Involve children/families in environment reviews.	- Review spaces against cohort needs and ASN profiles. - Evidence impact on participation, independence, confidence, risky play and wellbeing.
Children play and learn Playing, learning and developing Curriculum Learning, teaching and assessment	- Refresh curriculum rationale. - Create outdoor progression prompts for language, numeracy, STEM, wellbeing, sustainability and skills for life. - Improve consistency of observations, journals and next steps.	- Embed intentional small-group learning while protecting child-led play. - Moderate observations, floorbooks and journals termly to show progression. - Strengthen interactions and adult support outdoors.	- Use journals, floorbooks, transitions and family feedback to refine pathways. - Strengthen community links and family understanding of outdoor learning. - Show long-term progression.
Children are supported to achieve Nurturing care and support Wellbeing, inclusion and equality Children's progress	- Make personal plan, ASN/targeted support and transition review cycles consistent. - Use the Care Experience Evaluation Tool. - CPD on ASN, communication, regulation, trauma-informed practice and inclusive routines.	- Track impact of targeted supports and adapt strategies. - Strengthen family/partner review and children's voice. - Increase planned independence in routines and self-care.	- Use cohort evidence to identify gaps earlier. - Evidence children's participation in support planning. - Ensure confident, included and well-supported transitions.
Children are supported to achieve Safeguarding and child protection	- Introduce annual safeguarding audit: chronologies, incidents, medication/allergies, risk assessments, personal plans and bank staff induction. - Strengthen factual chronological recording.	- Review escalation routes, emergency arrangements and extreme weather/contingency procedures. - Revisit thresholds, recording and professional curiosity in supervision/staff meetings.	- Sustain consistent safeguarding culture. - Use learning from incidents, near misses and audits to update systems. - Evidence safe, responsive practice through clear records and confident staff.