

St. Joseph's Primary Family Learning Centre Day Care of Children

St. Joseph's Primary School
Old Luss Road
Helensburgh
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Telephone: 01436 671 748

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
23 September 2025

Service provided by:
Argyll and Bute Council

Service provider number:
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Service no:
CS2013315653

About the service

St. Joseph's Primary Family Learning Centre, operated by Argyll and Bute Council, is registered to provide day care services for up to 56 children aged 3 years to those not yet attending primary school. At the time of inspection, 29 children were in attendance. The service is located within St Joseph's Primary School and includes a spacious playroom, access to the school gym hall and direct access to outdoor facilities.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 22 and 23 September 2025. The inspection was carried out by one 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 children using the service
- gathered feedback from 10 families through online questionnaires
- spoke with staff
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents
- assessed core assurances, including the physical environment.

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.

Key messages

- Staff showed warmth, kindness, and compassion in their interactions with the children.
- Children were happy, relaxed, confident, and engaged in play across all areas of the nursery.
- Children played both independently and with others, and staff facilitated meaningful interactions in various play areas.
- Strong relationships between staff and families were evident, with daily interactions fostering a welcoming atmosphere.
- Leadership was encouraged at all levels, creating a culture where staff felt empowered and valued.
- Improvement planning and approaches to self-evaluation were clear which identified strengths, areas for improvement and promoted high quality across the setting.

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

Further details on the particular areas inspected are provided at the end of this report.

Leadership 5 - Very Good

Leadership and management of staff and resources

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.

During the inspection, it was clear that the headteacher, lead practitioner and staff team shared a strong vision focused on improvement and positive outcomes for all. The vision, values and aims promoted respect, kindness, honesty, and tolerance. These values were clearly embedded in daily practice and working relationships within the team were strong.

Leadership was encouraged at all levels, creating a culture where staff felt included, empowered, and valued. They had opportunities to lead change, which resulted in positive outcomes for children and families. Staff spoke passionately about recent developments, such as the introduction of the Froebelian Approach, which emphasised the importance of play and respected children's individuality.

The service demonstrated a strong capacity for change, showing clear adaptability in response to inspector feedback. The headteacher and lead practitioner had already begun implementing plans to triangulate evidence relating to children's plans, showing a proactive approach. Furthermore, they were confidently discussing next steps and identifying strategies to further enhance family engagement, reflecting a commitment to continuous improvement. The headteacher, lead practitioner and staff team actively took part in the inspection and welcomed suggestions for improvement. This positive approach was strengthened by thorough self-evaluation and quality assurance processes. As a result, the service was in a strong position to keep improving for the benefit of children and families.

Staff were regularly involved in self-evaluation through meetings and collaborative working. They reflected on practice using key questions like "How are we doing?" "How do we know?" and "What are we going to do now?" Staff reported engaging in self-evaluation activities, including peer evaluations, making use of good practice guidance and regular reviews of the learning environment. This helped staff stay informed and understand their role in improving outcomes for children.

Quality assurance systems and processes were well established. The monitoring calendar showed that the pace of change was carefully considered, ensuring staff were not expected to focus on too many areas at once. This allowed for meaningful reflection, deeper engagement with improvement priorities, and sustained progress over time.

The service improvement plan had a clear and purposeful link to staff professional development. Key priorities at the time included the Froebelian Approach and emotional literacy through the "Wee People Big Feelings" programme by Starcatchers. These initiatives supported staff to deepen their understanding of child development and emotional wellbeing, which led to more responsive and nurturing interactions with children. Staff reported increased confidence in supporting children's emotional needs and spoke positively about the impact on their practice. This meant that planning and professional learning contributed to improved outcomes for children.

Most practitioners had taken part in professional enquiry projects in areas such as outdoor learning, community, culture and partnership, literacy, numeracy, and block play. Staff from three local settings worked together on these projects. Staff spoke passionately about the opportunities they had and the positive impact on children and families. These projects enhanced teaching, enriched the learning environment, and led to more responsive and effective experiences for children.

Staff told us they felt warmly welcomed when they joined the service and were given an induction to help them settle in. One staff member described the process as informal, but still thorough and appropriate. Staff spoke confidently about how new colleagues are supported, explaining that instead of having one assigned mentor, the whole team works together to help each other. They showed a good understanding of the National Induction Resource and said that management took time to talk with them about their key children, making sure they had all the information they needed to feel prepared.

Children play and learn 5 - Very Good

Playing, learning and developing

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.

The management team focused on ensuring that staff had a strong understanding of child development. Staff spoke passionately about using the national guidance *Realising the Ambition*, highlighting the positive impact it had on their practice and their ability to skilfully support children. The Froebelian Approach was still developing, but we could already see it starting to influence practice, with staff placing more emphasis on play-based learning and respecting each child's individuality. We were impressed by the level of engagement and could clearly see that the environment had become a space for growth and learning.

We observed that children experienced high-quality play, learning and development opportunities. The routine of the day was well balanced allowing opportunities for both structured and free flow play and learning. Children confidently and independently led their play by making their own choices about where to play and what experiences they wanted to take part in. We observed staff skilfully interacting with children; supporting and enriching their play, as well as knowing when to step back and allow the children to build on their own ideas. Staff were proud of their achievements in supporting children to achieve their goals.

Staff made effective use of questioning during their interactions. This led to children having opportunities to develop their creativity, inquiry, and curiosity. We observed children to be engaged during indoor and outdoor play. Children had access to a variety of spaces. Staff were flexible and responsive to children's needs. Through these experiences the children were developing their social, emotional, and physical skills.

We observed children playing very well together, they were respectful, nurturing, and kind. Children were co-operative during play for example, a group of children playing imaginatively in the home corner, whilst another group took part in Highland Dancing. Children were also observed to plan, create and share ideas when helping to set up outdoors, one child had great enthusiasm for gathering water, and staff were quick to engage when the child asked for help.

Literacy and numeracy experiences were well documented and shared with families through floorbooks and Seesaw. National guidance such as Realising the Ambition, Curriculum for Excellence, Rights of the Child, and the Froebelian Approach were clearly reflected in practice. This was seen through activities like World Book Day, learning about life cycles, using The Colour Monster, and communication tools like boards and visual aids across the setting.

At the time of the visit, children were exploring patterns, and there was clear evidence of their voices being captured in planning and documentation. The use of floorbooks supported parental understanding of play-based learning, showing how meaningful learning opportunities were embedded in everyday experiences.

Staff supported children to recognise and regulate their emotions and feelings during play. The sound of children's laughter featured throughout the day, showing us that that they were confident, happy, safe, and having fun.

Planning was child-centred and highly responsive to children's interests, experiences, and developmental needs. The planning cycle began with Leuven observations, which helped staff assess children's levels of wellbeing and involvement. Sampled planning documentation clearly reflected a 'working document' approach. Staff made effective use of the local authority's tracking and milestones documentation, further strengthened by planning systems that supported each individual child. The use of Seesaw enabled staff to gather a wide range of information, allowing them to feel confident in their assessments and planning appropriate next steps in learning.

Children who needed additional support were very well supported. We found clear and robust plans in place, which also captured the views of other professionals involved through effective multi-agency working. Targets were clearly set and regularly reviewed. The service should now put in place a system that brings all important information together in one place.

Children are supported to achieve 5 - Very Good

Nurturing care and support

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.

Children were cared for in a warm and nurturing way. Staff worked closely together to make sure children felt safe and supported. They were kind, loving and respectful, offering comfort when children were upset. Personal care routines were carried out with sensitivity to protect children's dignity. We saw lots of caring interactions, including hugs, hand holding and gentle reassurance, showing that staff were attentive and responsive to children's needs.

Children and their families were respected, included and genuinely cared for by staff. Children were thriving and had secure attachments. Families told us "We have great interactions and communication. Each member of staff knows my children and are always happy to help in anyway should we need it." And "The staff are extremely helpful, kind and welcoming. They are very approachable and understanding on the needs of the children in their care."

Staff recognised how important it was to support children during transitions and understood that each child's experience could be different. During our visit, it was clear that staff knew the children well. The keyworker system was effective and helped children feel secure. Staff told us about the strong settling-in procedures, which were adapted to suit each child's individual needs. The process was not rushed, and this helped children feel safe and comfortable.

Children were happy, relaxed, confident, and enjoyed themselves in all areas of the nursery. Staff had worked hard to improve the environment, creating spaces that encouraged children to play together and build relationships. Some children played on their own and were content, while others interacted with their peers and staff. We saw lovely moments of children playing together in the house corner, quiet area, and small world play. This showed they were building friendships, using their imagination, and learning to share and take turns.

We found that the nursery followed the Local Authority's three-week menu, which met the standards set out in the Setting the Table guidance. We asked the management team to review the updated version of the guidance to ensure continued alignment with best practice. Children had water bottles to stay hydrated, but some were not refreshed during the day. Children would benefit from fresh water being available at snack and lunch time.

Staff had a clear understanding of children's health and dietary needs, with safe systems in place for storing and giving medication. We sampled health plans and found they clearly explained what staff should do in an emergency. The nursery worked with other professionals, including Health Visitors, Occupational Therapists, and Speech and Language specialists, to support children's needs. Sharing information and strategies helped ensure children received consistent care. Staff were confident and well-trained in safeguarding, ensuring children's safety and wellbeing.

Children engaged well in Care Inspectorate's Safe, Inspect, Monitor, Observe and Act (SIMOA) project, which encourages services to act responsibly to safeguard, protect and support children's wellbeing. This supported children's understanding of safety both in nursery and at home. Staff regularly discussed the project with children and involved families in meaningful ways. Consistent monitoring and supervision indoors and outdoors helped ensure children's safety.

Children's wellbeing was supported through strong personal planning. Staff worked closely with families to capture comprehensive information about children's individual needs, to set personal targets, and to review these plans regularly to ensure staff had the most up-to-date information. Families told us "We are listened to as parents and any suggestions we have they are implemented. We are very much on the same page." And "We receive weekly seesaw posts about what our child has been learning, and home links are provided on some of the posts to give us an idea of how we can support at home. We also have parents' evenings where we can discuss any concerns we may have with our child's keyworker." This team approach meant children received the right care at the right time, helping to meet their individual needs.

Clear, concise support plans were in place for children who required additional support. These plans highlighted positive partnership working with external agencies and enabled staff to respond to children in a sensitive and compassionate way, ensuring that their emotional and physical needs were met. Management and staff had strong relationships with families, and many experiences were shaped by children and their parents. Daily drop-offs and pick-ups supported an open-door approach, helping families feel welcome. During the inspection, one parent taught a karate session, and another was due to lead a science activity, showing how the nursery encouraged family involvement and supported early career learning.

Staff used digital platforms like SWAY and Seesaw effectively to share children's learning and experiences. This was especially helpful for families who speak English as an additional language, helping them stay informed and involved in their child's learning.

Staff were proud of the strong sense of community at St Joseph's. Parents were encouraged to share their views through questionnaires, and their feedback was respected. Children took part in a wide range of activities, which were warmly shared with families for example, Bookbug sessions, the mini-mudder fundraiser, stay and play events, and the celebration of 'Month of the Military Child.'

Future plans, such as a lending library and Macmillan fundraising events, aimed to build even stronger partnerships with families. The service's strong commitment to building positive relationships with families had a meaningful impact on both children and their parents.

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.com.

Detailed evaluations

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

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