

New Machar School Nursery Day Care of Children

New Machar School
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Newmachar
Aberdeen
AB21 0WB

Telephone: 01651 267 420

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
1 October 2025

Service provided by:
Aberdeenshire Council

Service provider number:
SP2003000029

Service no:
CS2003016328

About the service

New Machar School Nursery is registered with the Care Inspectorate to provide a care service to a maximum of 80 children at any one time, aged from three years to those not yet attending primary school.

The service is provided from a modern building within the grounds of New Machar Primary School in the village of New Machar, Aberdeenshire. The children have direct access from the playroom to an enclosed outdoor play area and are close to the local library, shop and other amenities.

There were up to 36 children present during the inspection visit.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 30 September 2025 between 09:30 and 17:00 and 1 October 2025 between 09:15 and 12:15. 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:

- spent time with children using the service
- spoke with five parents/carers
- received 18 completed questionnaires from parents/carers and staff
- spoke with staff and management
- assessed core assurances, including the physical environment
- observed practice and children's experiences
- reviewed documents.

As part of our inspections, we assess core assurances. Core assurances are checks we make to ensure children are safe, the physical environment is well-maintained and that a service is operating legally. At the time of this inspection, an improvement was identified relating to core assurances. We have reported where improvement is necessary within the section - Children thrive and develop in quality spaces.

During this inspection we 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

- The service was well led and effective quality assurance and self-evaluation processes supported the service to deliver high quality care and support.
- High-quality play and learning experiences supported children's development.
- Children benefited from nurturing, supportive and responsive care that fostered their wellbeing.
- Children's care was individualised and supported by information recorded in personal plans.
- Connections with families positively impacted the quality of children's experiences.
- The enthusiastic and skilled team were committed to delivering high quality experiences for children and families.

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 thrive and develop in quality spaces	4 - 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

Quality indicator: Leadership and management of staff and resources

We found major strengths in this aspect of the setting's work and identified very few areas for improvement; therefore we evaluated this quality indicator as very good.

Children and families benefited from a service with clear vision, values and aims. These included: "To provide a high quality safe and stimulating environment where learners are supported and challenged to enable them to be the best they can be." The values underpinning the service were embedded by the committed management and staff team in daily routines and interactions. This led to a service which was well led and staff were clear in their roles and responsibilities.

Staff and management recognised the importance of working collaboratively with children and families to drive positive change. Feedback from families was routinely gathered, analysed and used to inform improvement planning. Recent priorities identified included enhancing outdoor learning opportunities and increasing parental engagement. One parent commented: "I am often asked for feedback from both myself and my child." Another parent shared: "There are parent forum meetings to discuss ways the nursery can be improved." This contributed to active engagement with families and a quality culture.

There was an ethos of continuous improvement within the setting. Staff were reflective and regularly consulted best practice documents and discussed how they could develop the service. For example, staff reflections on mealtimes had resulted in better organisation and smoother transitions, resulting in a relaxed, positive experience for children.

Robust and embedded quality assurance systems monitored key aspects of the service. Regular monitoring of staff practice promoted high quality interactions and consistent care and support for children. A regular audit of medication stored on the premises and accidents and incidents highlighted any areas of concern. This helped keep children safe and well.

Clear processes were in place to support the induction and mentoring of new staff, students, and relief staff. The service made effective use of the national induction resource to ensure staff were equipped with the skills needed to provide high-quality care. Strong leadership was shown from the manager who had high aspirations and led by example. This approach supported staff confidence and wellbeing.

Quality indicator: Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

We found major strengths in this aspect of the setting's work and identified very few areas for improvement; therefore we evaluated this quality indicator as very good.

Staff were enthusiastic and committed to providing a positive experience for the children in their care. They showed respect and consideration in their interactions with each other as well as with the children. This promoted a happy atmosphere for children to enjoy. A parent commented: "The atmosphere at the nursery is very good, it is a happy place and I know my child is safe."

Children's care and support was promoted through staff's mix of skills, knowledge and experience which they readily shared with one another. This contributed to skilled interactions with children supporting them to learn and develop.

Staff were registered with a professional body and followed the codes of practice. This helped keep children and families safe. Annual appraisals, monitoring of practice and regular informal check-ins informed staff support plans and identified training needs. This enabled the setting to tailor professional learning opportunities to meet children, staff and the setting's needs. A parent commented, "The staff are very knowledgeable of child development and behaviour." Another parent shared: "The care and support [my child] has received has been second to none."

Staff had completed core training including first aid and child protection which contributed to keeping children safe and well. A range of additional professional learning opportunities had been undertaken. Staff confidently told us about the positive impact training had on their practice. This included supporting children's emotional wellbeing and critical thinking and problem solving skills through science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Staff provided training feedback at team meetings to share knowledge and promote consistent practice. As a result, children experienced staff who were open to new ideas and approaches that supported learning and wellbeing.

Children benefited from effective supervision and quality engagement throughout the day. Staff communicated effectively, monitored different areas and responded to children's needs by positioning themselves where they were needed most. Staff breaks were planned to minimise impact on the children whilst enabling staff to rest and be refreshed. This helped to ensure that children were safe and well-supported. Staff commented: "I feel we work well as a team and we have such a good relationship with the children" and "We support one another and I could not ask for a better manager."

Children thrive and develop in quality spaces 4 - Good

Quality indicator: Children experience high quality spaces

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

Children were cared for in a comfortable and welcoming environment. Play areas were furnished to a good standard with ample space and supported children's independence in making choices. Parents told us: "The nursery is clean and bright with plenty space" and "The setting has a calm, quiet room the children can access." Children were supported to care for their resources and surroundings. This promoted children and staff ownership, and pride in their environment.

Displays around the environment showcased children's artwork, creations, photographs and writing. As a result, children felt valued as they were able to share their learning with family and friends. This gave a strong message that children mattered and promoted their self-esteem and confidence.

Developmentally appropriate spaces were inviting with resources which reflected children's current interests. The construction area contained a range of high quality wooden blocks and shapes, natural open ended materials such as pipes and tyres, signs, tape measures and mark making materials. These opportunities supported children's critical thinking, cooperation and creativity.

Children's interests and play behaviours were observed by staff, who used this insight to adapt and enhance the environment. For example, the addition of shaving foam and ice supported children's interest in Arctic animals. This responsive approach enabled children to influence the design of spaces. This supported them to feel listened to and promoted a sense of value and inclusion.

Throughout the day, children had free flow access to outdoors which supported their wellbeing. The large space offered them room to join in physical play, experiment in the mud kitchen or learn about nature. Staff were currently considering ways to further develop the outdoor spaces to improve experiences for children. This reflected a commitment to continuous improvement.

Children's health was promoted by staff's understanding of infection prevention and control. Staff were clear about their responsibilities and carried out regular cleaning. Hand washing was well-supported at appropriate times throughout the day, including before and after eating and after toileting. However, the toilet facilities did not support children's privacy or help prevent the potential spread of infection. Despite efforts from management, the provider had not yet implemented a solution (see area for improvement 1).

Children's safety was promoted by the secure access to the building. Risk assessments had been completed to identify any hazards and actions taken to reduce the risk of harm. As part of the school there was janitorial support to ensure the building was well-maintained. Children were encouraged to assess day-to-day risks contributing to their safety. For example, when using real tools at the woodworking bench. This meant that children were developing an understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe.

Areas for improvement

1. To protect children's dignity and privacy and reduce the risk of infection, the provider should improve the environment to ensure the children's toilets are separated from the playroom.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: "If I require intimate personal care, this is carried out in a dignified way, with my privacy and personal preferences respected" (HSCS 1.4).

Children play and learn 5 - Very Good

Quality indicator: Playing, learning and developing

We found major strengths in this aspect of the setting's work and identified very few areas for improvement; therefore we evaluated this quality indicator as very good.

Children experienced high-quality play and learning opportunities that were engaging, meaningful, and responsive to their individual needs and interests. Children were happy and had fun as they confidently explored the well zoned play spaces. Indoors, children spent time being hairdressers in the role play area and exploring the sensory play on offer. Outdoors, children enjoyed a scavenger hunt and cooking in the mud kitchen. One child commented, "I'm making soup because it's a cold day." The wide range of resources and freedom to transport, supported children to extend their own learning in ways that were meaningful to them.

Staff demonstrated an understanding of child development and learning theory which they skilfully applied in practice. They showed sensitivity in recognising when to observe and when to engage, using these moments to extend children's curiosity and interest. As a result, children were respected, valued and achieving.

Language, literacy and numeracy were consistently embedded across play experiences. Opportunities for early mark making and early reading skills were promoted through the recognition of environmental print and books. Staff effectively combined a child's interest in snakes by providing opportunities to count and measure.

Digital technology was used effectively to enrich children's learning. Resources such as the smartboard, light box and tablet were used meaningfully to support engagement, exploration and skills development.

Strong partnerships with families supported understanding of play-based learning. Information was shared through online learning journals, curricular evenings and home learning packs. Visits to the local library, green spaces and shop supported play and learning experiences and confidence in the local community. Visits to residents in a local retirement complex supported intergenerational relationships and benefited children and older people.

Responsive and caring interactions supported the development of communication, language and social development. Staff used Makaton (a communication system using signs, symbols and speech) visual supports and simple language to meet individual needs. Effective questioning and commentary extended learning naturally across experiences. Children were encouraged to be responsible and kind, with staff celebrating these behaviours. This fostered a respectful and inclusive ethos.

Planning approaches effectively captured children's thoughts, ideas and discussions. Children's ongoing learning and development progress was supported by sharing observations and next steps with parents through online learning journals. Effective assessments ensured consistency and supported children's progress and development. Parents commented positively on children's play and learning experiences. One parent commented: "There always seems to be a lovely new activity going on." Another parent shared: "There is so much to do outdoors and free play to explore all the different options."

Children are supported to achieve 5 - Very Good

Quality indicator: Nurturing care and support

We found major strengths in this aspect of the setting's work and identified very few areas for improvement; therefore we evaluated this quality indicator as very good.

Children benefited from nurturing, supportive and responsive care that fostered their wellbeing. Staff responded sensitively to children's cues and emotions, providing cuddles and reassurance. On arrival, children selected emotion characters to help staff understand how they were feeling. This supported emotional literacy and self-regulation. Parents commented positively on the relationships staff had with their children. A parent commented: "[Staff] are all so happy, friendly, professional and caring." Another parent shared: "The warm and friendly greeting each morning has really helped my child to settle into nursery school life."

Transitions were well-considered and responsive to support children's health and wellbeing. New children were well-supported through visits, phone calls and collaboration with other settings. Familiar routines provided comfort and security, and older children were encouraged to support younger peers, promoting empathy and leadership. This meant children were happy, settled and secure.

Children experienced sociable and unhurried mealtimes with a relaxed, positive atmosphere. They were supported to stay hydrated throughout the day. Children had opportunities to be independent, for example self-serving, which supported them to build their confidence. Staff consistently sat with children throughout mealtimes. This promoted positive relationships and enabled them to support children to develop skills such as using cutlery.

Children's wellbeing was supported through effective personal planning. Personal plans promoted children's rights and detailed children's needs, interests and strategies of support. Regular communication with families through phone calls, meetings and daily conversations meant information was up-to-date and placed children and families at the heart of any decision-making process. Medication procedures were robust, with close collaboration between parents and staff to ensure safe administration. This supported children's health and safety.

Regular communication through meetings, emails and daily conversations supported connections with families. Families were welcomed and a parent room supported community engagement, this included health advice and Bookbug sessions. The keyworker system was effective, and families described staff as "approachable" and "friendly." A parent commented: "Staff are always engaged and interested in my child's wellbeing and life out of school too." Another parent shared: "I never feel rushed and open to ask anything." A parent commented positively on recent experiences such as: "Cosy play sessions, tea and toast sessions, sports day." These approaches promoted positive relationships and meaningful parental involvement in children's care and development.

What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection

Areas for improvement

Previous area for improvement 1

To promote children's health, wellbeing, care and support needs the provider should ensure children's personal plans are up-to-date, relevant and contain detailed information about children's needs and preferences, and how these will be met.

- a) Personal plans are reviewed and shared with parents/carers, at a minimum of every six months.
- b) Staff have knowledge of children's personal plans and understand their role in supporting children in accordance with these.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: "My personal plan (sometimes referred to as a care plan) is right for me because it sets out how my needs will be met, as well as my wishes and choices" (HSCS 1.15).

This area for improvement was made on 22 June 2023.

Action taken since then

Each child had a personal plan in place, developed collaboratively with families. Plans were reviewed regularly through in-person meetings with keyworkers. Plans contained relevant and up-to-date information that supported children's care. Staff demonstrated a strong understanding of individual children and confidently described their interests, needs, and how these were supported in practice. Where additional support was required, care and support plans included strategies to guide staff in meeting children's needs effectively.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

To support children's learning and development, the manager and staff should extend children's learning and play activities to meet their individual needs. This should include but not be limited to, group time activities.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: "As a child, I have fun as I develop my skills in understanding, thinking, investigation, and problem solving, including through imaginative play and storytelling" (HSCS 1.30).

This area for improvement was made on 22 June 2023.

Action taken since then

Children experienced a balanced mix of responsive and intentional learning opportunities. Staff were responsive to children's emerging interests and appropriate questioning was used to extend children's thinking. Daily group time experiences, including "story of the week," provided structure and continuity, while allowing space for spontaneous discussion.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 3

To ensure that outcomes for children and families continuously improve, the manager should develop robust and effective quality assurance processes. This should include but is not limited to, carrying out audits of children's information and personal plans, medication, children's chronologies and monitoring staff practice.

This is to ensure that children's care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: "I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes" (HSCS 4.19).

This area for improvement was made on 22 June 2023.

Action taken since then

Effective quality assurance processes were in place and included audits of medication and personal plans which helped keep children safe and well. Observations of practice helped identify where staff may benefit from further training.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 4

To ensure children are kept safe and receive high quality care, the provider and manager should ensure staff are effectively deployed and implement their role and responsibilities effectively.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: "My needs are met by the right number of people" (HSCS 3.15).

This area for improvement was made on 22 June 2023.

Action taken since then

A well-balanced mix of skills and experience across the team has contributed to high-quality care and learning. A consistent staff team supported continuity of relationships, helping children feel secure and settled.

Staff demonstrated a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities which contributed to a well-organised and responsive environment. Communication was effective, with tools such as walkie talkies used to support coordination and timely responses across the setting. Staff breaks were thoughtfully planned and managed to maintain consistent supervision and engagement.

This area for improvement has been met.

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
Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment	5 - Very Good
Children thrive and develop in quality spaces	4 - Good
Children experience high quality spaces	4 - 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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