

Dingwall (English) Nursery Day Care of Children

Dingwall Primary School, , Ross Avenue, , Dingwall, IV15 9UU
Ross Avenue
Dingwall
IV15 9UU

Telephone: 01349 862 081

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
25 September 2025

Service provided by:
Highland Council

Service provider number:
SP2003001693

Service no:
CS2003013583

About the service

Dingwall (English) Nursery is located within the grounds of Dingwall Primary School, in the town of Dingwall, Ross and Cromarty, Highland. Housed in a standalone building, the nursery features three indoor playrooms, each opening onto a shared, enclosed outdoor play area. An additional room is available for snack and mealtimes experiences, as well as providing a quiet space for rest and relaxation. The nursery benefits from its own dedicated entrance, with kitchen facilities in each playroom, toilets, two designated nappy-changing areas, and an office space. To further support children's lunchtime routines, the nursery also has access to the school canteen.

The nursery is registered to provide a day care of children's service to a maximum of 80 children aged from 3 years to those not yet attending primary school. The service operates Monday to Friday during term time and is provided by the Highland Council.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 24 September 2025 between 08:45 and 17:30 and 25 September 2025 between 08:45 and 15:00. Feedback was shared with the service on 25 September 2025. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate.

To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included previous inspection findings, registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with children using the service and three of their families;
- spoke with eight staff and the management team;
- reviewed online questionnaire feedback from eight families;
- reviewed online questionnaire feedback from four staff;
- observed children's experiences and daily life; and
- reviewed documents.

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; and
- 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 demonstrated a strong ethos of continuous improvement, shaped collaboratively with children, families, and staff, and embedded in daily practice through strategic self-evaluation and quality assurance.
- Leadership and staff development were effectively prioritised, resulting in a confident, skilled team delivering high-quality, inclusive experiences that supported children's wellbeing and learning.
- Staff applied a strong understanding of child development to create engaging, purposeful play experiences that supported creativity, imagination, and language development.
- The learning environment was thoughtfully designed to promote physical, social, and emotional growth, with children developing as confident, curious, and motivated learners.
- Children experienced warm, responsive care from skilled staff who thoughtfully adapted routines and environments to support individual needs, emotional wellbeing, and independence.
- Positive relationships with families were prioritised, with regular communication and collaboration helping to shape personalised care and promote continuity between home and nursery.

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

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.

Quality indicator: Leadership and management of staff and resources

The revision of the service's vision, values, and aims had been shaped collaboratively by children, staff, and families. This process had led to a clearly defined ethos of continuous improvement, driven by the leadership team. The shared values, centred on creating a happy, fun, safe, and nurturing environment, were embedded in daily practice. As a result, children experienced a setting where these principles were consistently reflected in their interactions, experiences, and overall wellbeing.

Self-evaluation within the service had been strategic and aligned with clearly identified priorities, including those from previous inspections and internal reviews. By engaging with best practice guidance and current national frameworks, the team had embedded a reflective culture that informed quality assurance and planning. This had led to targeted improvements such as enhanced snack experiences and more purposeful literacy and numeracy planning, directly supporting children's learning through play.

Family engagement had been central to the service's development approach, with their views actively shaping decisions around nursery day timings, profiling formats, outdoor improvements, and snack routines. Close collaboration with families to meet individual children's needs had ensured that changes were meaningful and responsive. As a result, children had benefited from a more personalised and inclusive experience that reflected their interests and supported their development.

Staff had been empowered to look outward and learn from other services, which had strengthened their confidence and skills in creating rich play environments. Improvements to indoor and outdoor spaces had resulted in children experiencing high levels of engagement, choice, and challenge. Quality assurance processes, including monitoring of practice and children's experiences, had been well understood and consistently applied, enabling the team to evaluate provision effectively and implement changes that enhanced outcomes for children.

Leadership within the service had demonstrated a strong commitment to building and maintaining a stable, skilled staff team, recognising its vital role in supporting the wellbeing of both children and staff. Recent staffing changes had been managed with clarity and purpose. Senior leaders had ensured that all new staff understood their responsibilities, whether in child protection, supervision of children, or in terms of play and learning, through a personalised induction programme aligned with national guidance.

A structured mentoring system had further strengthened staff development, with mentors given time and training to support new colleagues effectively. Staff had felt confident seeking guidance and accessing professional learning opportunities, which had enhanced their ability to deliver high-quality experiences for children. While children and families had not been directly involved in recruitment, new staff had been introduced through various channels, fostering familiarity and trust. These combined efforts had contributed to a nurturing and consistent environment where children benefited from well-supported, confident practitioners.

Quality indicator: Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

The management team provided effective leadership, working collaboratively with staff to foster a clear understanding of how children learned and developed. There was a shared commitment to high aspirations for all children. Professional development opportunities, such as infection prevention training, intensive interaction, and enhanced planning and assessment approaches, were used effectively to improve outcomes.

A strong culture of continuous improvement and professional reflection was evident across the service. Staff were supported through regular opportunities for professional dialogue, including weekly catch-ups and monthly meetings focused on self-evaluation. Effective supervision ensured staff understood their responsibilities, while a culture of openness encouraged reflection, shared success, and learning from challenges. Staff took pride in their work and demonstrated a proactive approach to addressing areas identified for development, including those highlighted in the previous inspection.

Staff made effective use of their collective experience, knowledge, and skills to enhance the quality of provision. Individual strengths were recognised and nurtured. For example, one team member, who led development of health and wellbeing, was at the early stages of implementing the 'Play on Pedals' initiative, while another was undertaking training to deliver Parents Learning Together sessions. A third contributed to early reading development by enhancing their professional knowledge and skills, using resources and support from Education Scotland. These targeted roles had the potential to lead to tangible benefits for children, including improved access to high-quality learning experiences and resources.

Strong systems were in place to support continuity of care throughout the day. Detailed handovers ensured staff were fully informed about children's needs, and effective communication, including the use of walkie-talkies, supported flexible and responsive teamwork. Staff demonstrated a collaborative approach, particularly when managing transitions, toileting, or responding to the arrival of children and families during the day. Newer staff reported feeling well supported by management and colleagues, enabling them to understand service processes and confidently fill gaps when needed. Absence cover was managed within the team wherever possible, using familiar staff from the school or nursery to maintain consistency for children. These well-embedded practices contributed to a stable, nurturing environment where children felt secure, understood, and consistently supported throughout their day.

Children play and learn
5 - Very Good

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.

Quality indicator: Playing, learning and developing

Staff demonstrated a strong understanding of child development, applying best practice to create play experiences that were both engaging and purposeful. Children were offered a wide range of opportunities to explore creativity and imagination through open-ended resources and sensory materials such as water and sand. Role play was well supported with areas like a pretend shop, a well-resourced mud kitchen, and themed provocations across all play spaces which were linked to children's interests. These experiences encouraged children's imaginative thinking, social interaction, and language development.

The learning environment was thoughtfully designed to promote physical, social, and emotional growth. Children accessed junk modelling and a variety of mark-making tools that supported self-expression and fine motor skills. Outdoors, they engaged in activities such as biking, balancing, and climbing, which helped build physical confidence and coordination. As a result, children developed as confident, curious, and motivated learners.

There was a clear focus on embedding language, literacy, and numeracy throughout everyday routines and play experiences. Children were encouraged to share stories, sing songs, mark make, count, and explore number symbols, shape and money in meaningful contexts. Staff worked closely with families to promote understanding of play-based learning. They shared children's experiences through pictures and videos, invited families to visit and observe play pedagogy in action, and engaged in informal conversations to explain the value and purpose of play-based approaches. As a result, children benefited from a consistent and well-informed approach that supported their holistic development.

Staff demonstrated a strong understanding of how to support children's learning through observation and responsive interactions. They used children's cues to guide their approach, helping to nurture their self-regulation, empathy, confidence, and curiosity. Developmentally appropriate questioning, commenting, and explanations were used effectively to extend learning. For example, staff supported children to count amounts using coins, explore shapes, and understand concepts like length and digital forms of money through everyday play. Children were given the freedom to lead their own play at their own pace. Staff made well-timed decisions about when to step in, offering support without interrupting the flow of play. This sensitive and respectful approach allowed children to remain engaged, think for themselves, and deepen their learning through meaningful experiences.

Planning across the service was child-centred and responsive to children's developmental stages and interests. Each room had its own thematic focus, such as seasonal interests, transport, or space, which reflected the diverse curiosities of the children. This approach helped ensure that children remained motivated and engaged through a balance of intentional planning, focused on individual goals, and responsive experiences that built on their emerging interests.

Staff used observations and assessments to recognise children's progress and achievements. There were examples of high-quality observations that clearly identified learning, such as progress in numeracy and literacy for individual children. Tracking learning had been identified as a key focus during the session, with staff receiving support to strengthen their skills in this area. Termly tracking sessions of individual children's progress were beginning to take place, helping staff to identify and plan next steps with a particular focus on early reading and number development. This ongoing work was helping to build consistency and depth in how children's learning was captured and understood.

The use of developmental overviews had begun to show impact. For example, areas of learning around children's understanding, expression, and imagination had been identified as a focus for one group of children and specific learning was planned to support them to develop these skills. While this practice was still being embedded, the service had recognised its value and remained committed to further strengthening it. As a result, children benefited from more targeted and informed support for their learning.

Children are supported to achieve 5 - Very Good

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.

Quality indicator: Nurturing care and support

Children benefited from warm, responsive, and consistent care from all staff, who demonstrated strong skills in supporting individual needs, including those with additional support needs. Transitions into the service were well-managed, with new children settling confidently due to opportunities to become familiar with the environment and staff beforehand. Daily routines were thoughtfully adapted to meet children's needs, such as providing quieter lunch spaces for those who benefited from reduced stimulation. Staff regularly assessed and adjusted provision to ensure it remained responsive and effective.

The environment was carefully designed to support children's emotional regulation and social development. A range of diverse spaces, including the sensory room, quieter areas, and large outdoor play zones, enabled children to engage in small group play, socialise, or enjoy time alone. Mealtimes were of high quality across both areas, with dietary needs well managed and snack provision reviewed in line with current guidance. Children were encouraged to be independent, taking part in preparing snacks, pouring drinks, and clearing plates, all within a homely setting enhanced by thoughtful touches such as flowers, tablecloths, and relaxing music. As a result, children experienced a nurturing and inclusive environment that promoted emotional wellbeing, independence, and positive social interactions throughout their day.

Consistent routines around mealtimes, naps, and personal care contributed to a strong sense of security and wellbeing. These daily moments were used meaningfully to connect with children and support their development. Medication procedures were well organised and clearly audited. Staff demonstrated confidence in responding to child protection concerns, and safeguarding was a regular topic of discussion at staff meetings. Recent self-evaluation activities had focused on this area, helping to ensure staff knowledge and skills remained current and robust. As a result, children experienced a safe, nurturing environment where their wellbeing was prioritised and their individual needs were consistently met with care and professionalism.

Personal planning was a well-established aspect of the service and contributed to supporting children's wellbeing. Plans were tailored to reflect each child's individual strengths, needs, and interests, with families involved in regular reviews to help maintain consistency in care. Staff liaised with other agencies where appropriate to ensure strategies were in place to promote children's care, support, and protection. The planning process was informed by wellbeing indicators, which helped guide assessment and decision-making. As a result, children benefited from a responsive approach that promoted their overall wellbeing and development.

The service demonstrated a strong commitment to building positive relationships with families, creating a warm and welcoming environment where communication was prioritised. Staff used tools such as an online app and individual paper profiles to share updates and support ongoing dialogue. Families reported that they were regularly involved in conversations about their child's care and development through handovers, stay-and-play sessions, and parent meetings, helping to foster trust and shared understanding. Some families commented: "We got lots of info and they were easy to contact.", "The nursery organises regular reviews of child achievements and I am encouraged to come in and look at his file at any time additionally

too." and "They told me how his day went and how his lunch went etc. They informed me about little friendships he made." All families who responded to our online questionnaire strongly agreed or agreed with the statement: 'I have a good relationship with the staff caring for my child'.

Staff actively sought out opportunities to strengthen family engagement, including through questionnaires and by offering family-focused stay-and-play sessions. Insights from families were used to tailor care to individual children's needs, such as sleep routines, dietary preferences, and health requirements. These collaborative approaches helped ensure that children received care that reflected their home experiences and individual circumstances. As a result, children benefited from consistent, responsive support that promoted their wellbeing 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 keep children safe and healthy and to promote their wellbeing, the provider should ensure effective infection prevention and control practices are in place. This includes but is not limited to:

- a) ensuring that correct hand washing routines are established and maintained, according to infection prevention and control guidance; and
- b) nappy changing areas are clean and hygienic.

This is to ensure that infection prevention and control practices are consistent with the Public Health Scotland document: Health protection in children and young people settings, including education.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'I experience high quality care and support based on relevant evidence, guidance and best practice.' (HSCS 4.11).

This area for improvement was made on 30 January 2025.

Action taken since then

The service effectively implemented effective infection prevention and control practices. Robust handwashing routines were established and consistently maintained in line with current guidance, ensuring children understood and followed hygiene practices throughout the day. Nappy changing areas were observed to be clean, well-organised, and hygienic, with appropriate procedures in place to minimise the risk of cross-contamination. These measures contributed positively to keeping children safe, healthy, and supported in their overall wellbeing.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

To support the effective development of the service and improve children's experiences, the provider should ensure effective quality assurance processes are implemented that cover all aspects of the service.

This is to ensure that 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 30 January 2025.

Action taken since then

The service successfully addressed the area for improvement relating to quality assurance. Effective processes were implemented that covered all aspects of the provision, including planning, observation, staff deployment, and the learning environment. Regular monitoring and reflective practice supported continuous improvement and ensured that children's experiences remained high quality and responsive to their needs. These systems helped drive the ongoing development of the service and contributed to positive outcomes for children.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 3

To ensure children's care and support needs are met and they receive high quality experiences, the provider should ensure there are sufficient staff deployed effectively, taking account of children's care and support needs and the layout of the service.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'I am confident that people respond promptly, including when I ask for help.' (HSCS 3.17); and 'My needs are met by the right number of people.' (HSCS 3.15).

This area for improvement was made on 30 January 2025.

Action taken since then

Staffing levels were consistently sufficient, and staff were deployed effectively across the setting to meet the care and support needs of all children. Consideration was given to the layout of the environment, ensuring that staff were positioned where they could best support play, learning, and wellbeing. As a result, children received high-quality experiences in a safe, nurturing, and well-supervised setting.

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 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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Contact us

Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

enquiries@careinspectorate.com

0345 600 9527

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