

Hopefield Castle Nursery Day Care of Children

The Nursery at Brixwold
Cockpen Road
Bonnyrigg
EH19 3HS

Telephone: 01316295005

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
14 October 2025

Service provided by:
Newbyres Nursery Ltd

Service provider number:
SP2015012549

Service no:
CS2021000195

About the service

Hopefield Castle nursery is an early learning and childcare setting situated in the area of Bonnyrigg, Midlothian. It is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 66 children aged between 2 years and primary school entry at any one time. Of those 66, no more than 28 are aged 2 years to under 3 years.

The setting is close to local primary schools, parks and other amenities. Children are cared for in two play spaces with direct access into the garden. These spaces were named Buzz room for children aged 3-5 years and Bumbles room for children aged 2-3 years. Both age groups have toileting and changing facilities.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Wednesday 08 October 2025 between 09:00 and 15:00 and Thursday 09 October between 09:00 and 15:00. 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:

- spent time with children using the service
- received 13 completed on line questionnaires from families
- spoke with staff and the management team
- received eight completed on line questionnaires from staff
- assessed core assurances, including the physical environment
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents

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

- Children experienced warm, nurturing relationships to help them feel safe, valued and confident to explore and learn.
- Families felt welcomed and listened to, with trusting relationships that supported children's wellbeing and progress.
- Routines and transitions supported independence, creating calm, predictable experiences for children.
- Children experienced good quality spaces that supported their play, learning and development.
- The outdoor environment provided many strengths but needed improvement to offer richer invitations to play and more opportunities for independent learning.
- Leaders and staff shared clear values and worked together to deliver positive outcomes for children and families.
- Quality assurance and reflection supported improvements, with plans to strengthen consistency and leadership 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	4 - Good
Children thrive and develop in quality spaces	4 - Good
Children play and learn	4 - Good
Children are supported to achieve	4 - Good

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

Leadership 4 - Good

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.

Leadership and management of staff and resources

The setting benefitted from stable, consistent leadership and a committed team. Leaders had a visible and active presence in the playrooms each day, helping them stay closely connected to children's experiences and oversee staff practice effectively. Staff told us they felt well supported and valued leaders' regular involvement in play and routines. The shared vision of giving every child the best start in life was evident in daily practice and interactions with children and families. Staff could describe what they meant in practice and how they influenced decision-making, creating a strong sense of purpose and consistency across the team.

Families described the setting as, "very welcoming", "well managed" with a "team that really care". Staff noted, "I feel confident to respond to children's needs effectively. All families are lovely to speak to and I feel respected by the leadership team". Families agreed, with one noting, "I know if I ever need to ask or raise a concern, I can have a conversation with the manager". This supported strong partnerships with families and helped ensure children felt secure and well cared for.

Leaders promoted a culture of reflection and improvement. There was evidence of self-evaluation using national guidance such as Realising the Ambition (Scottish Government, 2022). Leaders had plans in place to use the Quality Improvement Framework for the Early Learning and Childcare Sectors (Education Scotland and Care Inspectorate, 2025) to guide self-evaluations and drive continuous improvement across the setting. Staff were encouraged to contribute to improvement discussions and their views were valued. Feedback from families informed change, with one noting, "They really listen and take on board suggestions". This collaborative approach meant improvements were meaningful and benefitted children's experiences.

Quality assurance processes were developing well. Leaders regularly observed playrooms, supported staff reflection and provided constructive feedback to enhance practice. Learning from this was shared at team meetings, helping to ensure consistency and sustained improvements over time. Leaders were aware that staff appraisals were overdue to be carried out to build on staff strengths and identify professional learning priorities.

Recruitment and induction followed clear, safe practices, in line with safer recruitment guidance. New staff told us they felt welcomed and well supported, benefitting from a structured induction and opportunities to shadow experienced colleagues. The setting placed importance on mentoring and professional learning, with opportunities for training. Staff described feeling valued and encouraged to develop their skills, which supported retention and team stability.

Leaders demonstrated a good understanding of their responsibilities in relation to the management of staffing and resources. Staffing levels were maintained to meet the needs of children and contingency plans ensured cover when required. Families felt reassured, telling us, "There always seems to be enough staff. Our child feels safe and well cared for".

Leaders showed a strong commitment to sustainable, continuous improvement. They recognised what was working well and identified areas that could be strengthened, including embedding quality assurance systems more systematically and continuing to develop leadership roles within the team. This meant children benefitted from consistent, reflective practice and a setting that responded to their needs.

Children thrive and develop in quality spaces 4 - Good

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 experience high quality spaces

Children benefited from well-designed and engaging environments that supported their wellbeing, learning and development. Staff ensured playrooms were welcoming and thoughtfully arranged with open-ended resources that encouraged exploration, choice and engagement. Families told us they were always greeted with a smile and that their children felt very comfortable and included when arriving at the setting.

Indoor spaces promoted independence and confidence. Children accessed materials freely, choosing where and with whom to play, which encouraged children to make decisions and take ownership of their learning. Staff noted children knew where resources were and could get what they needed, demonstrating how well the environment encouraged autonomy and active engagement. Play areas offered a balance of quiet and creative experiences that reflected children's interests. Displays of their artwork and photographs celebrated their achievements and strengthened their sense of belonging.

The setting placed strong emphasis on safety, maintenance, suitability of resources and effective supervision of children's play. Daily checks and risk assessments enabled children to explore freely in a safe environment, promoting confidence and wellbeing. Families told us they felt reassured their children were well cared for, with one noting their child felt safe and happy in the setting. Staff highlighted regular safety checks, maintenance reporting and leadership oversight to keep children safe. The environment and resources were well maintained, supporting safety and promoting children's confidence, curiosity and learning.

Staff provided inclusive, varied resources that responded to children's stages of development and interests. Staff regularly reviewed and refreshed materials to maintain curiosity, challenge thinking and maintain engagement. Children were encouraged to share their views about how spaces could be used or improved, showing the setting's commitment to listening and acting on their voices. One area in the Buzz Room was underused. Although the area was thoughtfully set up with inviting and high-quality resources, staff told us it was rarely used when children had free flow to the garden, which was available for most of the day. This suggested that the space was not being fully utilised to enhance children's play and learning experiences. Staff should consider how best to adapt the daily flow and use of space to ensure children benefit fully from all play and learning opportunities.

Children play and learn 4 - Good

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.

Playing, learning and developing

Children experienced a warm, engaging and stimulating environment where they could learn and develop through meaningful play. Staff demonstrated an understanding of how children grow, learn and progress, using their knowledge of child development to create a balance of child-led and adult-initiated play. Families told us, "It's very child-led with lots of outdoor play and creativity" and "Staff are always down at the children's level, joining in and encouraging them."

The learning spaces were well resourced, offering opportunities for exploration, problem-solving and imaginative play. Children were seen to be engaged in building, constructing and creating and were given time and freedom to follow their own ideas. Most staff skilfully supported this, extending play through gentle questioning and conversation that encouraged children to think, predict and explore possibilities.

Outdoor spaces formed an important part of daily experiences and contributed positively to children's health and wellbeing. Staff provided regular opportunities for children to be active, explore natural materials and engage in imaginative, social and fun play. While outdoor play was a clear strength, further improvements would enhance learning opportunities. Leaders and staff told us they planned to develop the outdoor environment and visit other settings to gather good practice ideas. This should be progressed soon to provide purposeful invitations to play, increased access to independent resources and create more fun opportunities for outdoor literacy and numeracy to be embedded into everyday play and experiences. This would help children extend their ideas and sustain engagement in the outdoors.

Planning for play was informed by Curriculum for Excellence (Education Scotland, 2010) and Realising the ambition (Scottish Government, 2022). Curriculum for Excellence supported a broad, balanced curriculum, while Realising the ambition guided nurturing, developmentally appropriate play experiences that promoted children's wellbeing, curiosity and independent learning. New initiatives, like Busy Bee's bespoke 'Bee Curious' curriculum, planned to support literacy, numeracy and creative development. Staff were keen to use these resources to further support children's curiosity and family learning.

Staff incorporated children's ideas into activities and outings, ensuring learning was meaningful, inclusive and personalised. Families valued the range of experiences and responsive staff, while also suggesting that sharing more information about specific learning could help them continue children's learning at home. Staff used floor books, photos and conversations to capture and build on what children said and did. This approach supported children to see their ideas valued and acted upon, strengthening their confidence as capable learners.

Children are supported to achieve 4 - Good

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.

Nurturing care and support

Children benefited from warm, responsive relationships with staff, fostering a strong sense of wellbeing, belonging and confidence. Staff demonstrated an understanding of each child's individual needs, preferences and routines which helped children feel confident throughout their day. Families commented on the positive impact of these relationships, saying, "Our child absolutely loves 'the castle'. Seeing how happy and settled they are gives us complete reassurance they are well looked after" and "Our child is developing

in the best way we could hope for". Staff reflected on their role in nurturing children with one noting, "I feel I have a good relationship with families and know their children well. They feel confident to tell me their thoughts". These strong relationships promoted children's engagement, confidence and positive interactions.

Transitions between rooms and daily routines were carefully managed to minimise disruptions to children's care and learning experiences. Staff used consistent routines, songs and clear communication to help children understand what was happening next. Families described improvements in their child's confidence and social skills since joining the setting, showing that thoughtful planning supported continuity and stability in children's experiences.

Mealtimes offered children opportunities to make choices, develop independence and enjoy healthy home-cooked foods. Staff created a calm and nurturing environment, role modelling social behaviour and encouraging natural conversation which supported children's communication and sense of belonging. Alternatives were provided for children with preferences or dietary needs and families valued the varied, nutritious menu, with one noting, "My child has developed good eating habits overall" and another commenting, "The chef knows what my child doesn't eat and encourages new foods". Systems ensured allergies and dietary needs were managed safely. Families suggested that seasonal menu changes happened more timeously and that daily updates on food intake could be more accurate throughout the day, indicating that clearer communication would further enhance information sharing.

Medication procedures were well managed. Records were accurate and staff followed procedures for administration, storage and review, ensuring children's safety and wellbeing.

Personal plans contained relevant information about children's care, learning and wellbeing, with evidence of family input. Families reported that they were involved in reviewing their child's plan and appreciated being asked about home routines and progress, with one noting, "They send out questionnaires linking home and nursery so we can share what my child is working on." A few families suggested reviews could happen more regularly with clearer links between plans and the daily updates. We observed strategies being implemented, such as one-to-one support for children who needed it, but these should be recorded clearly to show progress and achievements. There was a need for staff to consistently review and update personal plans, observations and strategies to track progress accurately with dates. Leaders needed to ensure scripted language, visual aids and other strategies were used consistently for children to support them to thrive.

Family engagement had strengthened. Families spoke positively about the caring ethos and the way staff supported both children and families. They described approachable, professional staff and regular opportunities to give feedback verbally and in writing. Some noted that while feedback opportunities were available, they would welcome more frequent updates and clearer information on how their suggestions influenced their child's experiences. Leaders were already exploring more structured ways to capture and act on family views.

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 high quality play, learning and development opportunities, the provider should ensure that:

- staff adopt an engaged approach, empowering children to lead their play and learning
- play is valued through an increased understanding of child development, and ensuring that children's needs and interests were central to all aspects of play and learning
- play experiences develop children's skills in language, literacy and numeracy.

This is to ensure 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, investigating and problem-solving, including through imaginative play and storytelling' (HSCS 1.30).

This area for improvement was made on 15 October 2024.

Action taken since then

Staff had taken positive action to improve their practice. They participated in training and used team meetings to reflect on and discuss the area for improvements. Together, they had developed an action plan which outlined how progress would be achieved and monitored. This approach helped support consistency and accountability across the team.

Staff now demonstrated an engaged and responsive approach, empowering children to lead their on play and learning. They used their improved understanding of child development to plan experiences that reflected children's interests and needs. Play was valued and staff interactions extended children's ideas. Staff should now build on the progress in promoting children's skills in language, literacy and numeracy but providing further everyday experiences in the outdoor environment as described in this report.

This area for improvement had been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

To promote children's care, play and learning, the provider should ensure staff write observations to demonstrate an understanding of children's needs, interests and development. These observations should be promptly approved by management to validate staff's work and give parents the opportunity to stay informed of their child's learning.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state: '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 15 October 2024.

Action taken since then

Staff now wrote observations that showed an understanding of children's needs, interests and development. These were completed promptly and reviewed by leaders, ensuring consistency and validation of staff practice.

This area for improvement had 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

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Children experience high quality spaces	4 - Good
Children play and learn	4 - Good
Playing, learning and developing	4 - Good
Children are supported to achieve	4 - Good
Nurturing care and support	4 - Good

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