

Aberchirder School Nursery Day Care of Children

Aberchirder Primary School
Smith Crescent
Aberchirder
Huntly
AB54 7TW

Telephone: 01466 780 241

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
7 October 2025

Service provided by:
Aberdeenshire Council

Service provider number:
SP2003000029

Service no:
CS2003016302

About the service

Aberchirder School Nursery is situated in a residential area of the village of Aberchirder.

The service is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 30 children aged from 2 years to those not yet attending primary school at any one time. Of those 30 no more than 5 children are aged between 2-3 years.

Twenty six children were registered with the service at the time of the inspection.

The service is provided in a large room within the school, with access to toilets, nappy changing and an outdoor play area.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 6 October 2025, 09:30 and 17:20 and 7 October 2025 between 09:30 and 16:30.

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 and complaints information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered throughout the inspection year. To inform our evaluation we:

- spent time with children using the service
- spoke with two parents/carers
- received 15 completed questionnaires parents/carers and five from staff
- spoke with the staff and the management team
- 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, no improvements were identified relating to core assurances.

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 benefitted from an ethos of nurture and respect. This was evident in staff practice and interactions.
- Quality assurance processes were being developed, and some were in the early stages. Managers should continue to develop quality assurance practices, involving all staff in using recognised self-evaluation tools to identify where children's experiences could be improved.
- Children enjoyed playing in thoughtfully arranged spaces.
- Children's play was supported well to promote creativity and learning.
- Planning for children's learning was being developed. Staff were being supported to develop skills and confidence in this area.
- Children were cared for by staff who knew them well and strived to meet individual needs.
- Families were welcomed into the setting and staff were considering further ways to meaningfully involve parents/carers in children's experiences.

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 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

Quality indicator: Leadership and management of staff and resources

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 benefitted from a clear ethos of nurture and respect, which was evidenced in staff practice and interactions. Staff consistently showed kindness and compassion, creating a warm, inclusive environment. Leaders promoted high standards of care, helping children and families feel welcomed, valued, and supported.

Children's care was guided by a vision, values, and aims shared with the wider school. These had been reviewed with staff and shared with families. We encouraged management to involve children and parents in future reviews to better reflect their views and preferences.

Children learned about their rights and wellbeing through the use of characters linked to the GIRFEC wellbeing indicators. For example, staff referred to "Safe Sally" when discussing safety. This approach helped children make meaningful connections and contributed to them developing a sense of safety and awareness of their rights.

Families' experiences were regularly evaluated to support ongoing improvement. Children's interests and voices were captured using floorbooks and responsive planning of activities. Parents/carers were invited to share their views through questionnaires and were kept informed about changes made in response to their feedback. All agreed or strongly agreed, when we asked, if they felt involved in the development of the service, with one telling us "I took part in the 2 stars and a wish questionnaire recently." These approaches helped ensure experiences were meaningful and tailored to children's needs.

Leaders fostered a culture of continuous improvement and collaboration. Staff felt confident contributing ideas and leading change. Improvements were recorded on clear plans, helping staff understand their responsibilities. Managers understood the importance of leading the pace of change thoughtfully. Staff felt listened to, resulting in a proactive, solution-focused team, committed to improving outcomes.

Quality assurance practices were being developed and supported positive experiences for children. Audits and a self-evaluation framework were used to assess the effectiveness of provision. Some observations of practice had helped staff reflect and improve and we encouraged the manager to include all staff in these. Staff were not yet consistently using recognised self-evaluation tools to identify where children's experiences could be enhanced. The manager had plans to continue to develop quality assurance practices further to identify areas for improvement.

Children's care was supported by safer recruitment practices. Recent staff changes had presented challenges; however, the team worked well to minimise disruption and maintain consistency. New staff were supported to understand their roles. Staff described a strong, supportive team that helped each other, creating an environment where they felt confident providing high-quality care.

Children play and learn 4 - Good

Quality indicator: Playing, learning and developing

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 generally engaged, happy and motivated. Spaces were creatively arranged, with resources displayed invitingly to provoke interest and exploration. For example, playdough, which children had helped make, was available in the home corner. Children enjoyed making "cookies" and sharing them with their friends. Real life and natural resources, such as baking equipment, measuring tools and pinecones enriched children's play.

Opportunities for children to develop language, literacy and numeracy skills were embedded throughout the setting. This included regular stories, songs and music. Free flow access to outdoors supported physical play. Children had opportunities to explore, run and climb, and staff supported them to understand how to keep themselves safe. Parents shared positive feedback about the range of play and learning opportunities offered.

Children experienced positive interactions that supported their learning. Staff demonstrated a strong understanding of how children learn and responded well to their cues. Some were less skilled in extending children's learning and managers were aware of where support in this area would be beneficial.

Frequent praise and encouragement helped children feel confident and secure. For example, when a group of children made "stick men", staff offered suggestions and gave them space to explore their own ideas, learn from mistakes and problem solve. Other children were welcome to watch or join in as they pleased, and one child happily adapted the activity to make an "aeroplane." This resulted in individualised experiences, which supported imagination and creativity.

Planning for children's learning was in the early stages of development. A new format helped balance spontaneous play with planned learning and placed children's needs at the centre of all learning experiences. The impact of new approaches, such as "next step stars," where children recorded what they wanted to learn, was not yet evident in improved experiences. Staff's confidence and consistency in planning for learning varied. This was recognised within the service improvement plan. Managers were supporting staff to build knowledge and skills in delivering child-led, high-quality learning.

Families were meaningfully involved in their children's learning, which was shared using an online platform. Regular meetings with their children's keyworkers enabled parents to contribute to planning next steps and understand their children's progress. One parent told us "[My child] loves showing me through her learning journal about her day." Others spoke positively about regular meetings with their children's keyworkers. These approaches promoted strong partnerships between home and the setting.

Children are supported to achieve 4 - Good

Quality Indicator: Nurturing care and support

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 benefitted from warm, consistent approaches. Staff valued positive relationships with children and families, creating a welcoming environment. They were patient when children struggled to express emotions and fostered positive interactions between children, encouraging kindness and turn-taking. One parent commented "The staff, they are a great example for the children, positive, supportive, engaging and they all want the best for every child in their care."

Parents were encouraged to spend time in the setting during settling visits and stay and play sessions. Schemes such as a food bank, in collaboration with a local supermarket, contributed to the supportive ethos. Parental engagement was identified in the service improvement plan as an ongoing priority. At the time of inspection, staff were exploring further ways to meaningfully involve parents in children's experiences. These measures contributed to an inclusive environment where children and families felt respected and cared for.

Staff knew children well and effectively used personal plans to support their understanding of individual needs. When other professionals were involved, these reflected agreed support strategies. Parents reviewed plans regularly. However, review dates were not always recorded and some information in children's medication records could have been clearer. The manager agreed to make adjustments to ensure all information is current, accessible and complies with guidance.

Children had opportunities for independence. They helped prepare healthy snacks, set up and tidied away activities and meals, and served their own food and drinking water. They accessed the bathroom independently, where staff supervised them appropriately. When children needed assistance with personal care, this was carried out respectfully and sensitively. This contributed to confident children who enjoyed learning life skills and taking responsibility for their own wellbeing.

Routines generally supported children's needs; however, we identified some instances where children's experiences could be improved. For example, some children struggled to engage during a prolonged group story before lunch, which limited opportunities for learning. Although staff recognised the importance of supportive mealtimes, staff deployment during lunch limited support for some children. Revised staff lunch breaks on day two resulted in a more sociable experience. Management agreed to consider the ongoing structure and delivery of group activities and mealtimes to better meet all children's needs.

Transitions were flexible and supportive. Staff worked with parents to understand preferences and needs. Settling in visits were flexible and informal. Transition for children moving to school included a "whole school" approach where children spent time in the wider school and with their older peers. This helped children feel safe, secure and confident during any changes.

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	4 - Good
Leadership and management of staff and resources	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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