

Sunnybank School Nursery Day Care of Children

Sunnybank School
Sunnybank Road
Aberdeen
AB24 3NJ

Telephone: 01224 261 700

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
20 November 2025

Service provided by:
Aberdeen City Council

Service provider number:
SP2003000349

Service no:
CS2003014521

About the service

Sunnybank School Nursery operates from within Sunnybank Primary School, in the city of Aberdeen. The service is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 64 children aged from three years to not yet attending primary school at any one time.

Children have access to playrooms, a kitchen, toilets and changing area and an enclosed outdoor area. The service is close to parks, local shops and other amenities.

Up to 29 children were present during the inspection.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 18 November 2025 between 09:00 and 17:05 and 19 November 2025 between 08:25 and 12:45. 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 eight of their parents/carers
- received six responses to our request for feedback from parents and staff
- assessed core assurances, including the physical environment
- spoke with staff and management
- 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 were very happy, confident and settled.
- The staff team worked very well together to meet children's needs.
- Partnership working with parents was a key strength in the service delivery.
- The setting should review their free flow system to ensure children have greater daily access to outdoor play, supporting their health, wellbeing, and learning experiences.
- Quality assurance process were robust and well embedded, however outcomes could also be made more measurable to strengthen evaluation.
- Staff used their skills and knowledge to ensure good quality outcomes for children.

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	4 - 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 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.

The service vision, values, and aims had been updated recently through a collaborative process involving staff, children, and families. These were clearly displayed in the cloakroom area accompanied by photos and prompts which gave parents an insight into how the service had implemented their values and aims. We observed these being actively promoted within the setting and reflected in improvement planning, for example promoting the children's voice. This demonstrated a strong commitment to shared ownership and embedding the service's values in daily practice, ensuring they are meaningful and visible to all stakeholders.

The setting valued the views of children and families and aimed to strengthen parental engagement and children's voice within improvement planning. Feedback was gathered in various ways, including the Seesaw app, questionnaires, and feedback sheets following stay-and-play sessions. The impact was shared through cloakroom displays. Planning had recently been developed to include children's rights and mind maps were used to capture children's ideas, while parents were encouraged to share home interests. Staff were meaningfully involved in self-evaluation and demonstrated clear awareness of improvement priorities, confidently discussing their roles in implementing change. This was evident through the staff floor book, e-book, and audits. These approaches reflected a strong commitment to collaborative improvement and inclusive practice, ensuring that children, families, and staff contributed meaningfully to shaping the service. Parents told us they were involved in a meaningful way to develop the setting.

Quality assurance processes were robust and well-embedded. A clear quality assurance calendar, supported delegation and leadership roles, meaning there was a systematic monitoring and improvement programme. Staff understood their responsibilities and spoke confidently about working groups, sharing skills and knowledge to up skill each other. For example, staff taking the lead on promoting keeping children safe. Monitoring, audits, and support and supervision meetings were meaningful and had a positive impact on practice. For instance, monitoring of learning and engagement led to advice on staff positioning, and a lunchtime audit resulted in staff eating with children. Accident and incident audits highlighted patterns, prompting staff to model gentle behaviour, which reduced incidents. Staff felt well supported which promoted wellbeing and professional development. For example, management provided targeted support for staff to develop their observational skills, offering buddy systems and dedicated time off the floor, which built confidence. Seniors viewed support and supervision as an opportunity to celebrate strengths and progress. These approaches demonstrated strong leadership and a culture of continuous improvement, ensuring quality assurance had a direct and positive impact on outcomes for children.

Improvement plan priorities were clear and relevant to the setting, and these were shared with families in the cloakroom. Post-it notes with staff comments highlighted actions taken, allowing families to see progress. Some improvements were already having a positive impact on outcomes for children and families. Going forward, time frames should be considered to maintain momentum and support continuous improvement. Outcomes could also be made more measurable to strengthen evaluation, for example, specifying what an increase in parental engagement or a library use looks like. This would make the impact clearer and enable reflection on whether strategies needed adjustment or further work. Establishing measurable outcomes would close the gap, ensure progress is visible and success is well-defined. These steps would enhance accountability and drive continuous improvement.

Induction processes were tailored to meet the needs of the different staff roles and responsibilities, supported by national induction resources. Although no new staff had joined the service recently, an early years intern had recently completed induction with a senior acting as mentor. The national resource was used effectively to guide the process, encouraging good questioning and reflection. This supported the intern to develop a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities, contributing to consistency and positive outcomes for children.

Children play and learn 4 - Good

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.

Management and staff demonstrated a good understanding of child development and applied relevant theory and best practice, drawing on current guidance to enhance learning. They actively used the Care Inspectorate's Keeping Children Safe campaign, reviewing language and introducing the 'SIMOA' elephant to support safety awareness. Children were involved in risk assessments and garden checks, confidently identifying hazards such as broken toys, demonstrating an emerging awareness of safety and responsibility.

Generally, children were encouraged to lead their play with time and space to explore interests. Outdoors, they investigated and solved problems. For example, when snow fell, staff modelled gathering and shaping snowballs, prompting children to predict outcomes and test ideas. This supported curiosity, motivation, and engagement. The setting was working to improve free-flow outdoor access using a photo board system, but this was not yet fully effective, resulting in limited outdoor time. We asked the service to review this to ensure children have greater daily access to outdoor play, supporting health and wellbeing.

Literacy and numeracy were well supported through the environment and interactions. An audit informed improvements such as adding packaging to the home corner and introducing real-life items like clocks, magazines, and cameras to enrich role play. While some labelling was in place, there was scope to increase this further. Children enjoyed spontaneous storytelling, singing, and rhymes, with plans to extend these outdoors. Alternative storage solutions were being explored to support this. These approaches reflected a commitment to meaningful learning experiences.

Staff were actively engaged in play, using strategies such as modelling, commenting, and questioning to extend thinking. For example, at the sand tray, an adult supported a child to explore wet sand, leading to sustained engagement and language development. However, in another instance, redirecting play outdoors interrupted children's curiosity. Supporting staff to consistently build on play through responsive interactions would strengthen learning outcomes.

Parental engagement was promoted through initiatives such as library sessions, stay-and-play, and PEEP (learning together programme). Parents' feedback highlighted partnership working and meaningful family engagement. They reported that children experienced a wide range of enjoyable and purposeful activities, including outdoor play, which supported their learning and development. The Seesaw app encouraged families to extend learning, for example through a seasonal scavenger hunt during holidays. This demonstrated a proactive approach to involving families in children's learning and strengthening home/setting connections.

Planning processes were collaborative and valued by staff, supported by fortnightly team meetings. Intentional planning was communicated with parents and discussed with children, such as the current tooth-brushing focus. Responsive planning was evident, following interests like moving from dry to wet sand or exploring mushrooms outdoors. Floor books and Seesaw documented activities and children's voices, though clearer evidence of progression is needed.

Observations reflected staff's knowledge of children, but next steps were not consistently identified, making it difficult to track progression and celebrate achievements. Staff recognised this as an area for development and were exploring digital solutions to highlight next steps. Management maintained an overview through trackers and spreadsheets, ensuring a clear understanding of children's progress. This reflected good collaborative practice and a commitment to continuous improvement. However, embedding next steps into planning and would strengthen evidence of progression and impact.

Children are supported to achieve 5 - Very Good

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 were cared for in an environment built on the understanding that nurturing relationships are fundamental to growth and development. They received consistent, warm, and responsive care that promoted their overall wellbeing. For example, children confidently approached staff by name, held their hands during play, and sought comfort through cuddles. Staff demonstrated awareness that transitions could be challenging and adopted tailored strategies to support each child. For instance, younger children were given gentle alerts such as, "We're going to tidy up for lunch soon." When children changed classes, this was also thoughtfully managed. Staff accompanied children during moves, while those remaining were given time and reassurance to prepare for new staff members. These approaches supported smooth transitions, minimized disruption to learning, and helped children feel safe, secure, and sensitively cared for.

Staff's strong knowledge of children influenced daily routines. For example, they identified that some children and families needed support with tooth brushing. Children were well supported to brush their teeth as part of their routine, with adults modelling the process. Engaging activities were provided to develop understanding and spark interest, such as brushing model teeth with toothpaste. The setting also used the Seesaw app and sticker charts to reinforce learning and involve families. As a result, children were developing positive oral health habits and confidence in self-care.

Improvements to mealtimes were evident. Staff acted on feedback from monitoring carried out by management to create a more positive experience for children. Lunchtime took place in the school dining hall exclusively for nursery children and staff, resulting in a calm and unhurried atmosphere. Mealtimes were used as opportunities to promote independence and learning. Children actively participated in tasks such as serving food, pouring drinks, and scraping plates. They were also encouraged to prepare snacks by chopping a variety of fruit and vegetables. Staff sat with children during meals, eating alongside them, fostering supervision, social interaction, and language development. Meals were nutritious, reflective of cultural backgrounds, and adapted to accommodate allergies and individual preferences, ensuring that mealtimes remained safe and enjoyable for all children.

Children's wellbeing was actively promoted through effective personal planning that identified their individual strengths, needs, and interests. Wellbeing indicators provided a holistic overview, enabling staff to plan care and support thoughtfully. Where individual strategies were required, these were clearly highlighted for staff, ensuring consistent implementation to meet each child's unique needs. Staff worked in close partnership with children, families, and professionals to maintain and enhance wellbeing. For example, the setting had built strong relationships with health visitors, speech and language therapists, and RADS (Russel Anderson Development School) which provided fitness and health coaching. Using the nursery space had helped foster meaningful connections. Families were further supported through collaboration with local charities, such as Mission Christmas during the festive season. This illustrated the setting's commitment to supporting families and promoting positive outcomes.

Staff demonstrated a strong knowledge of children and their families, which they identified as a key strength of the service. Regular meetings to review personal plans enabled staff to learn from families and provide targeted support, such as guidance on eating habits. Daily interactions were warm and welcoming; for example, on a snowy morning, staff assisted parents in preparing children for outdoor play. The setting promoted cultural sensitivity and inclusivity, with care and learning shaped by family contributions. In the cloakroom, a multilingual welcome sign and a world map featuring QR codes linked to recipes and stories from around the globe reflected this approach. Parents also recorded themselves reading stories in different languages, which children could access by scanning QR codes within the setting. These connections enriched learning experiences and strengthened relationships between children, families, and staff. Parents spoke very positively about their engagement with the setting. One parent said, "All staff are really professional, caring and understanding of family dynamics." Another parent shared, "Staff are friendly and accommodating."

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	4 - Good
Playing, learning and developing	4 - Good
Children are supported to achieve	5 - Very Good
Nurturing care and support	5 - Very Good

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