

South Lodge Primary School Nursery Day Care of Children

South Lodge Primary School
Castle Road
Invergordon
IV18 0LW

Telephone: 01349 852 521

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
30 October 2025

Service provided by:
Highland Council

Service provider number:
SP2003001693

Service no:
CS2003017267

About the service

South Lodge Primary School Nursery is operated by The Highland Council and is based in the grounds of South Lodge Primary School, Invergordon. South Lodge Primary School Nursery is registered to provide a day care service to a maximum of 40 children aged 3 years to those not yet of an age to attend primary school.

The accommodation provided is within two main rooms with access to a spacious outdoor play area. The outdoor play area contains a range of loose parts and open ended resources which extend and enrich the children's imaginative play and learning experiences.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 29 October 2025 between 08:45 and 16:45 and 30 October 2025 between 10:00 and 14:00. 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, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

- spent time with children using the service;
- received 7 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, no improvements were identified relating to core assurances.

Key messages

- Children were happy, confident and having fun.
- Children enjoyed a lovely calming mealtime experience.
- Staff were very nurturing and caring towards children, who they knew well.
- Work had began to improve the quality of the information recorded in personal plans including observations/planning and next steps.
- Quality assurance processes need to be embedded to secure sustained improvements across the service

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	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Children play and learn	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Children are supported to achieve	4 - Good

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

Leadership 3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

We evaluated this quality indicator as satisfactory/adequate where strengths just outweighed the weaknesses.

Quality indicator: Leadership and management of staff and resources

The service displayed their vision, values and aims statement in the nursery cloakroom, encouraging people's awareness of what to expect from the provision. This practice reflects an understanding of the importance of shared values in shaping high-quality provision. The service was responding appropriately to recent changes in staff and children by reviewing its vision, values, and aims. Involving children and families in developing a clear, shared vision would strengthen ownership, enhance inclusivity, and ensure the statement truly reflects the aspirations of the whole community.

The manager has begun to allocate dedicated time each week to lead and manage the service, which is a positive step toward strengthening leadership capacity. In collaboration with a senior member of staff, clear roles and responsibilities have been established, reflecting an emerging structure to support effective management. However, this approach is still at an early stage and is not yet fully embedded in practice, limiting its current impact on service quality. Sustained implementation and monitoring will be essential to ensure that leadership time is consistently prioritised and used effectively. Until this is achieved, the previous area for improvement still remains in place. (See section, What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection).

An action plan for improvement had been implemented following the previous inspection. While self-evaluation was at an early stage, the management team demonstrated a clear understanding of its importance. The management team and staff had started to consider how this would be embedded using the new "A quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors: childminding". Engaging in regular self-evaluation and quality assurance processes would support continuous improvement and help promote positive outcomes for children and families. As a result an area for improvement in relation to ensuring robust quality assurance systems will remain in place. (See section, What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection).

Opportunities for parents to provide feedback on the service included regular surveys, Seesaw app and stay and play sessions. Feedback from families was routinely gathered and used to inform improvement planning around the environment in the nursery. Parents spoke positively about the service and felt listened to and able to raise issues. One parent commented: "I am able to communicate with the teachers when dropping off and picking up my son. I can also communicate with the seesaw app or even phoning if I need to discuss anything". Another parent shared: "I always feel comfortable to talk about anything my child needs and any improvements needed". This contributed to active engagement with families and a quality culture.

Staff recruitment processes were robust and fully aligned with safer recruitment guidance, demonstrating a strong commitment to safeguarding. The induction programme was well-structured, effectively introducing new staff to key policies and procedures. Feedback from staff indicated that they felt highly supported throughout induction and ongoing management guidance, which reflects a positive organisational culture. This level of support enabled new staff to quickly develop confidence in their roles. Overall, these practices significantly contribute to maintaining a safe, competent, and confident workforce.

The management team and staff demonstrate a strong commitment to continuous improvement, which is evident in their proactive response to staffing changes and the appointment of a new senior member. By beginning to engage with best practice documents and self-evaluation tools, the team is laying the foundation for a reflective and improvement-focused culture. This approach indicates an emerging ethos of accountability and quality enhancement, although its impact is not yet fully embedded across practice. Continued and consistent use of these tools will be essential to ensure improvements are sustained and lead to measurable outcomes for children and families.

Children play and learn 3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

We evaluated this quality indicator as satisfactory/adequate where strengths just outweighed the weaknesses.

Quality Indicator: Playing, learning and developing

Responsive and caring interactions were a clear strength, effectively supporting the development of communication and language skills. Indoor and outdoor environments offered a range of resources that promoted choice and independence, enabling children to move confidently between areas and engage in self-directed play. Overall, the experiences provided were stimulating and encouraged creativity and curiosity, which reflects strong practice. However, the current provision of natural and open-ended materials remains limited, reducing opportunities for deeper exploration and imaginative play. The management team has begun to review playroom layouts and plan for the inclusion of loose parts, which is a positive step toward enhancing creativity and extending learning. Continued focus on this area will be essential to ensure the environment fully supports high-quality, child-led experiences.

Indoors, there were some opportunities for children to enhance their skills in literacy and numeracy. These included access to books and mark making as well as sorting and counting. There was some individual story telling and singing in response to children's interests.

The outdoor area supported physical play well, offering space for running, digging and climbing. This contributed positively to children's physical development and wellbeing. However, the outdoor space lacked opportunities to support literacy, numeracy and curiosity-led learning. There was scope to enhance this area with mark-making tools and numeracy-rich resources.

A planning system to develop children's interests, play and to build on prior learning was in the early stages of being developed. Effective observations of children's learning and development was also an identified area for improvement. Work was ongoing with staff to develop consistent approaches to both planning and recording observations effectively. We saw that some observations were linked to the floor books, however, some recorded observations of learning did not always show progression or any next steps. This meant the approach did not effectively support children to reach their full potential. Until this is achieved, the previous area for improvement still remains in place. (See section, What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection)

Children made use of their local community through trips to their library, and staff highlighted how beneficial these were and children really enjoyed their time within their community.

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.

Quality Indicator: Nurturing care and support

Children experienced warm and nurturing care from all staff members. Children were given praise, reassurance and physical comfort when they needed it and this supported them to feel settled and secure. Staff worked well together as a team, communicating clearly when they were moving from one area to another, or when children had individual needs. This was very evident over the lunchtime period when staff were focused on children, and children's experiences were not compromised. Parents were overall happy with the care their child received.

Some comments from parents include;

"Staff are very welcoming, friendly, easy to approach".

"The staff are great and really kind, makes it more peace of mind when sending your kid to nursery that they are in good hands. Really good with each child and what their personal target is and able to challenge them a little more".

Personal planning was not yet consistently effective in recording strategies to ensure children's health and wellbeing needs were being met. The management team have recognised this and were at the early stages of developing these further along with chronologies, to make improvements and clearly identify support strategies in place for these children. As a result, not all children were being effectively supported to reach their full potential, therefore an area for improvement in relation to personal planning remains in place. (See section, What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection).

Significant improvements to snack and mealtimes have had a clear positive impact on children's experiences. The unhurried, calm, and relaxed atmosphere reflects highly effective practice, promoting a sense of security and wellbeing. Independence is strongly encouraged, with children confidently pouring drinks and self-serving, which demonstrates progress in developing self-help skills. Food choices are consistently nutritious, and the provision of fresh water throughout the day supports healthy hydration. Staff interactions during mealtimes are purposeful and engaging, effectively fostering language development and communication skills. As a result, all children benefit from a rich, social experience that enhances both their learning and wellbeing.

The service demonstrated effective communication practices through regular meetings, emails, and daily conversations, which supported strong connections with families. Parents were consistently welcomed into the setting during drop-off, and staff engaged positively in conversations, fostering trust and partnership. However, opportunities for improvement were identified at pick-up times, where the same level of engagement was not consistently observed. Ensuring that all families are warmly welcomed and provided with opportunities to share information at collection would strengthen relationships further and reinforce parents' sense of being valued within the setting.

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 support children's wellbeing, development needs and progress, being effectively met, children's personal plans should be further developed and streamlined.

This should include but is not limited to:

- a) Plans should be reviewed and updated as children's needs, challenges and achievements change, or at least every six months in line with legislation.
- b) All staff are knowledgeable about each child's health and wellbeing needs and that tailored care and support strategies are provided and used effectively to meet those needs.

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 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 29 August 2024.

Action taken since then

Personal planning was not yet consistently effective in recording strategies to ensure children's health and wellbeing needs were being met. The management team have recognised this and were at the early stages of developing these further along with chronologies, to make improvements and clearly identify support strategies in place for these children. As a result, not all children were being effectively supported to reach their full potential.

This area for improvement in relation to personal planning remains in place

Previous area for improvement 2

To effectively deliver high quality play and learning experiences, the manager should support staff to access training appropriate to their role and apply the training to their practice.

This should include but is not limited to:

- a) How to complete meaningful high quality observations.
- b) Reporting and recording children's progress and identifying meaningful next steps.
- c) Using best practice guidance to support high quality interactions and play experiences.

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 29 August 2024.

Action taken since then

A planning system to develop children's interests, play and to build on prior learning was in the early stages of being developed. Effective observations of children's learning and development was also an identified area for improvement. Work was ongoing with staff to develop consistent approaches to both planning and recording observations effectively. We saw that some observations were linked to the floor books, however, some recorded observations of learning did not always show progression or any next steps. This meant the approach did not effectively support children to reach their full potential.

This area for improvement has not fully been met and remains in place.

Previous area for improvement 3

To support the effective running of the service, the provider should ensure that the manager allocates time each week to effectively manage and lead the care service provided.

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

'I use a service and organisation that are well led and managed'. (HSCS, 4.23).

This area for improvement was made on 29 August 2024.

Action taken since then

The manager has begun to allocate dedicated time each week to lead and manage the service, which is a positive step toward strengthening leadership capacity. In collaboration with a senior member of staff, clear roles and responsibilities have been established, reflecting an emerging structure to support effective management. However, this approach is still at an early stage and is not yet fully embedded in practice, limiting its current impact on service quality.

This area for improvement has been partly met.

Previous area for improvement 4

To support children's wellbeing and promote the continued development and improvement of the service, the manager should ensure robust quality assurance systems are in place.

This should include but is not limited to:

- a) Regular opportunities for reflection and self-evaluation of practice.
- b) Regular monitoring of the quality of children's experiences and care.
- c) Auditing all children's information recorded, including accident and medication information, ensuring this corresponds between recording formats.
- d) Regular monitoring of staff practice to identify good quality skills and practice as well as training needs.

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 29 August 2024.

Action taken since then

While self-evaluation was at an early stage, the management team demonstrated a clear understanding of its importance. The management team and staff had started to consider how this would be embedded using the new "A quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors: childminding". Engaging in regular self-evaluation and quality assurance processes would support continuous improvement and help promote positive outcomes for children and families.

As a result an area for improvement in relation to ensuring robust quality assurance systems will remain in place.

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	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Leadership and management of staff and resources	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Children play and learn	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Playing, learning and developing	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Children are supported to achieve	4 - Good
Nurturing care and support	4 - Good

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