

Cradlehall Primary School Nursery Day Care of Children

Cradlehall Park
Inverness
IV2 5DB

Telephone: 01463 791 195

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
30 October 2025

Service provided by:
Highland Council

Service provider number:
SP2003001693

Service no:
CS2003017192

About the service

Cradlehall Primary School Nursery is a day care of children service situated within the primary school in the Cradlehall area of Inverness.

The service is registered to provide a care service for a maximum of 40 children aged three years to not yet attending primary school.

The service is situated in a residential area near shops, woods and other amenities. The children are cared for in a purpose built playroom with direct access to an enclosed outdoor area. Children eat lunch in a separate room from the main school canteen. They also regularly have access to the school library and hall.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Wednesday 29 October, between 09:30 and 16:30, and Thursday 30 October 2025, between 08:30 and 16:30. This inspection was carried out by three 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 and spoke with three of their families
- received fourteen completed questionnaires which included eleven received from families/carers of children, and three received from staff/relatives and carers.
- spoke with staff and the management team
- assessed core assurances, including the physical environment
- observed practice and daily life
- 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 experienced consistently warm, caring interactions from staff and this approach helped children feel safe, valued, and loved, contributing to their emotional wellbeing
- Children benefited from an engaging, mainly child-led learning environment indoors and outdoors, offering varied experiences that encouraged creativity and independence,.
- Children's care and development were supported through personal plans that were regularly reviewed, ensuring information remained current and relevant, including referrals for specialist support.
- The service exhibited a commitment to continuous improvement where staff confidently initiated improvements, such as enhancing outdoor areas and refining lunchtime routines.
- Vision, values, and aims were under review to ensure they were meaningful for children and families.
- Staff interactions promoted language, communication, and social development through questioning, modelling, and extending play, fostering children's curiosity, confidence, and progress in learning.

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	5 - Very 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 service demonstrated a strong ethos of continuous improvement, with staff empowered to self-evaluate and lead changes. Vision, values, and aims were under review to ensure they were meaningful for children and families. The service strived to capture the views and ideas of families and children. This meant that children's and families' voices were embedded throughout the work of the service, and reflected in feedback, floorbooks, and communication.

Purposeful, proactive self-evaluation drove positive changes, resulting in high-quality experiences for children. Staff showed confidence in initiating improvements, such as the recent development of the outdoor area. Staff were fully engaged in the process of reflection and self-evaluation. These processes were embedded in their practice, resulting in changes which positively influenced children's experiences and outcomes. For example, staff had continued to reflect on changes to lunch time routines, recognising that further improvements could be made to children's meal times.

Monitoring and auditing systems were in place. They were not yet consistently moderated to ensure robust quality assurance. For example, moderation of learning journals and consistent follow-up on identified areas for development would strengthen practice across the team.

The service demonstrated consideration of continuity of care when managing staff absences. Wherever possible, familiar staff were deployed to provide cover, minimising disruption to children's care, routines and support. There was a mix of experience and skills across the staff team. The manager had identified recruitment and induction processes as key areas for further development. We suggested the service might explore how individual staff strengths could be utilised to continue to build a consistent level of staff skills and knowledge. Overall, the service showed capacity for improvement, with the pace of change contributing to positive outcomes for children.

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.

Playing, learning and developing

Children experienced an engaging and varied learning environment. Planned and responsive experiences were well balanced and mainly child-led, both indoors and outdoors. This supported children to explore through play, to develop creativity and independence. Children were motivated and engaged, enjoying meaningful activities which promoted a variety of skills, such as fine motor skills. Staff interactions were

generally skilled, fostering language, communication, and social development through questioning, modelling, and extending play. These approaches enabled children to have fun while progressing in their learning.

During play children were supported by skilful staff interactions which demonstrated strong language and communication skills to model vocabulary and extend their understanding through quality, exciting learning experiences. Skilled approaches such as wondering, commenting, and explaining helped foster curiosity and enriched learning. Praise was used effectively to recognise success and build confidence, enabling children to take next steps. These practices promoted language, communication, and social development, contributing positively to children's progress.

Play provocations and interactions led to learning experiences which promoted language, literacy, and numeracy development. For example, the construction area offered opportunities to use metre sticks and explore measurement, while activities such as floating in the tuff tray encouraged the use of positional language through both child-led approaches supported through high quality interactions. Some staff demonstrated strong skills in modelling and introducing numeracy vocabulary during these experiences. There was scope to strengthen these approaches to embed these practices further.

Children's learning and development benefitted from encouragement to engage with digital technology. For example, children were encouraged to use digital cameras to record pieces of work in their learning journals which they had built or made. Continued development of digital play opportunities would further enrich experiences.

Some areas of the setting were well developed with resources to enrich children's imaginative play and creativity. There was scope to continue to develop this approach in one or two areas, such as the role play home area. Storytelling was available on demand in a cosy space invitingly furnished. A well-planned weekly library session encouraged children to explore books and to choose stories to be read aloud. Play and learning were paced to suit individual needs, and children generally had fun exploring through play.

Children had regular opportunities to be involved in planning. Those that were interested were supported to contribute ideas, their own words, marks and drawings to floorbooks. This supported planning to reflect children's current interests. Staff responded by creating inviting, exciting play opportunities for children. Staff often played with children, down at their level. This led to some joyful play and enabled staff to provide some individual support and challenge through skilful interactions.

Observations generally captured children's development of skills and learning. Achievable, individualised next steps successfully highlighted how further support or challenge would enable most children to develop and make progress. Some observations highlighted children who were demonstrating good progress in learning. It was not always clear how this was being supported through intentional planning. The service should now consider how developmentally appropriate play and learning experiences are tailored to provide challenge for children where appropriate to their needs.

Parent had regular opportunities to learn about their child's progress through stay and play sessions and use of a digital platform. This was also used to share and celebrate children's wider achievements with each other via a smartboard. Staff ensured that everyone was included, helping all children to feel valued.

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 experienced consistently warm and nurturing interactions from staff who prioritised building positive relationships. Staff were responsive to individual needs, offering comfort and reassurance when required. Children confidently sought comfort and support, which was freely given through gestures such as sitting on laps and cuddles. This approach supported children to feel safe, valued and loved, contributing to a positive emotional approach.

Children's care, support and development benefitted from personal planning which documented ongoing needs. Strategies to support individual needs, such as language development, were in place and referrals for specialist support were actively pursued. Some skilful staff interactions supported a child with identified needs to have space to play and communicate with peers. Staff intervened appropriately with support strategies as identified in personal plan. Some strategies lacked clarity. For example, specific approaches within a language development programme were not always detailed. Plans were regularly reviewed with families meaning that recorded information was current and support provided was relevant to meeting children's needs. When capturing information for personal plans, we suggested these should include more detailed information where there are other professionals involved in supporting the child. There were consistent follow ups to documented needs which contributed to positive outcomes.

We found a child and family centred approach to the transition process from home to joining the service. For example, where children had split placements, parents' permission was sought and noted. As a result, communication between settings was established to support individual needs. The service also involved other professionals where appropriate, such as the health visitor, to support families and children to have a successful start to their ELC journey.

Children's dignity and privacy benefitted from staff who supported children discretely with personal care. Handwashing before eating was consistently supervised, promoting good hygiene. Supervision was less consistent after toileting and when transitioning from outdoor to indoor play. This had the potential to increase the risk of cross infection. The service should now consider to increase consistent supervision of handwashing routines throughout the day.

Some transitions were managed flexibly, taking into account children's level of engagement. For example, when some children became disengaged during a group activity before lunch, staff responded by introducing an alternative activity. In addition, a child with identified needs was enabled to continue play at the creative table. This reflected an understanding of children's needs and contributed to positive engagement. Some routines, such as gathering for the second lunch sitting, would have benefitted from a more responsive approach to children's preferences. For example, enabling play to continue uninterrupted until transition to the lunch room.

Children experienced calm and relaxed mealtimes that supported sociable and positive interactions. Staff had created unhurried routines. Lunch was served over two sittings, which contributed to a quieter environment, promoting sociable conversations. Staff sat with children which supported a safe eating experience. Opportunities for fostering independence skills were well developed at snack times. Staff encouraged learning about healthy choices, which was reflected in the options provided. There was scope to

further enhance independence during lunch, for example, by enabling children to collect their own food. Children transitioned smoothly from lunch to play. Access to an area set up with a variety of resources reduced the time that children waited to make their return to the main playroom. Fresh water was readily available and accessed during play, supporting children's wellbeing.

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

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