

Gartocharn ELCC

Day Care of Children

Ross Loan
Gartocharn
Alexandria
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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
21 November 2025

Service provided by:
West Dunbartonshire Council

Service provider number:
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Service no:
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About the service

Gartocharn Early Learning and Childcare Centre is a daycare of children service provided by West Dunbartonshire Council and located within the village of Gartocharn, West Dunbartonshire.

The service is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 30 children not yet attending primary school at any one time. With the maximum of 30 children to ensure that no more than 9 are aged 2 years to under 3 years.

The accommodation comprises three playrooms, children's changing facilities and toilets. There are also large, enclosed outdoor spaces that provide children with valuable opportunities for outdoor play and learning. The service is situated within the grounds of Gartocharn primary school.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 20 and 21 November 2025. 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:

- spoke with a small number of children using the service
- spoke with one family member of children using the service
- spoke with staff and management present on the days we visited the service
- gathered feedback from 5 staff members using a questionnaire
- gathered feedback from 15 family members using a questionnaire
- observed staff practice and children's experiences
- assessed core assurances, including the physical environment.
- 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

- The service's vision, values, and aims were reflected in everyday practice, creating an inclusive ethos where children thrived and staff worked collaboratively to achieve this.
- Management and staff demonstrated a strong commitment to continuous improvement, using self-reflection as part of daily routines to ensure positive experiences and outcomes for children and families.
- Children were highly engaged, confident, and motivated in their play, leading their own learning indoors and outdoors in ways that promoted independence, curiosity, and creativity.
- Literacy and numeracy were woven through daily routines and the learning environment, supporting children to develop confidence and early skills.
- A wide range of high-quality resources, digital tools, and community experiences provided meaningful opportunities for learning.
- Children consistently experienced warm, nurturing, and responsive care that supported their emotional security, sense of belonging, and inclusion.
- Staff worked closely in partnership with families to ensure children's individual needs were met.
- Strong relationships and close community connections created a welcoming environment where children and families felt respected, valued, and at the heart of 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	5 - Very Good
Children play and learn	5 - Very 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

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.

Quality Indicator: Leadership and management of staff and resources

The service vision, values, and aims were communicated to families and reflected in practice. The ethos of "Growing our future together" was embedded throughout the setting. Staff fostered a nurturing, inclusive, and stimulating environment that supported holistic child development. Child-friendly values such as teamwork turtle and confident crocodile were reinforced through visual prompts and soft toys, promoting positive behaviours and key skills through play. Achievements linked to values were celebrated and shared with parents using photographs and certificates.

Management demonstrated strong, values-based leadership and genuine care for children, families, and staff. They were visible and supportive on the playroom floor, promoting a positive team culture where staff felt respected, valued, and motivated. A shared vision guided practice and strengthened teamwork. Staff highlighted the positive impact leadership had on them personally and professionally, with one commenting, 'Our manager is fantastic, super supportive and always aware of individual needs'.

Champion roles promoted distributed leadership and enabled staff to confidently lead initiatives. Staff were passionate about responsibilities such as forest kindergarten, eco schools, and Book bug, with roles allocated according to individual strengths and interests. During our visit to the forest area, staff shared the benefits of these experiences and how they supported children's learning and wellbeing. As a result, children experienced high-quality outdoor learning delivered by knowledgeable, caring staff.

Collaboration between the school head teacher and nursery principal supported shared leadership and strengthened transitions. One parent spoke positively about this process and the supportive impact it had on their child and family. As a result, children experienced smooth, well-planned transitions tailored to their individual needs.

On-going induction supported staff to understand the setting and children's needs, the use of a skills passport strengthened reflection and professional growth. Staff commitment to development was evident through be the best reviews, wellbeing discussions, and training such as child protection, the promise award, and realising the ambition. Training records demonstrated reflective practice and its impact on improving approaches, contributing to confident practitioners who delivered rich, meaningful experiences for children.

Children and families experienced a warm, welcoming, and inclusive environment. Parents were invited into the service daily, creating natural opportunities for meaningful conversations. One parent shared, 'Every single staff member welcomes us the same way every morning and at collection time. The consistency of friendliness and openness is amazing'. Alongside an open door policy, feedback was gathered through questionnaires, newsletters, and the Seesaw app. Children's voices were valued, and staff contributions informed continuous improvement.

Management and staff demonstrated a strong commitment to improvement, supported by quality assurance systems such as a monitoring calendar and improvement plan. Literacy and numeracy remained key

focuses, we identified these as strengths and saw a positive impact across children's learning. A lunch room had been developed, providing quieter mealtime experiences. Staff told us this contributed to more settled routines and improved children's engagement in activities such as baking and bread making, supporting the development of practical life skills. As a result, the use of calmer spaces positively impacted children's wellbeing.

Monitoring strategies, including playroom observations, mealtime reviews, and audits, supported staff practice and identified areas for development. A floor book captured self-reflection and highlighted strengths. We discussed with management the benefits of formalising playroom monitoring and adding evaluations to the floor book to show the clearer impact of change within the self-evaluation cycle to support ongoing improvement.

Systems were in place to monitor compliance in areas such as accidents, medication, risk assessments, and maintenance, supporting a safe environment for children. During discussions with management, it was agreed that streamlining medication and health care plan documentation would improve usability for all.

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.

Quality Indicator: Playing, learning and developing

Children were happy, settled, and deeply engaged in play. The learning environment was thoughtfully designed, offering a wide range of resources that sparked creativity and curiosity, alongside cosy areas for rest and relaxation. Children explored freely, made confident choices, and showed enthusiasm for learning through play.

Children eagerly showed us around, highlighting favourite toys and activities and showing pride in their nursery. Roles such as safety, kindness, lunch, and recycling monitors promoted leadership and responsibility, with children wearing badges to represent these. Individual trays and peg areas supported a sense of ownership, while a family wall with photos from home helped children feel connected and secure.

An achievement display celebrated successes including, dancing and cycling, showing that staff valued children's interests beyond the nursery. As a result, children felt respected and included, showing pride in their achievements.

Staff interactions were warm, responsive, and respectful. They helped children consider safety and resolve conflicts calmly. They knew children well and engaged at appropriate times to extend thinking, staff consistently used open ended questions to support problem solving and deeper engagement in learning.

Staff challenged children learning and thinking in positive and encouraging ways. For example, when a child wondered what would happen if zeros were added to numbers, it sparked discussions about making numbers "massive," and children responded excitedly and enthusiastically.

Literacy and numeracy were naturally woven into daily routines and group activities. Children explored ice, discussed how water freezes and minus temperatures, and engaged in pattern work, matching, and sorting. Early writing was practised through signing in, tracing letters, copying names, and sharing news.

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Additionally songs such as the days of the week, along with a variety of books and name stickers for children to place on their work, further supported language development and early literacy. As a result, children were curious, motivated, and confident, developing literacy and numeracy skills.

Technology enriched learning through tools such as walkie-talkies, communication pads, cameras, remote-control toys, and the smart board. These resources encouraged collaboration, problem-solving, and a continued love of learning.

Planning was flexible and responsive to children's interests. Staff were allocated to specific areas and took ownership of providing challenging, meaningful experiences. One parent commented, 'There is always a range of different activities on offer both outdoors and indoors'. We observed staff following children's lead and engaging purposefully in areas of interest. Tracking systems were in place, with the principal actively monitoring progress to help identify next steps and ensure consistent support for children.

A recent focus on 'People Who Help Us' included a visit from a doctor, with more visitors planned. Children spoke confidently about different roles, emergency numbers, and their own aspirations. In the home corner, transformed into a doctor's surgery, children cared for dolls, applied plasters, and engaged in role play that fostered empathy and an understanding of real-life situations.

Children's learning was recorded through a digital app, with observations shared with families to celebrate achievements and keep them informed. One parent commented, 'we love seeing our child's photos on Seesaw and the progress they are making'. Accessible paper profiles also enabled children to revisit and reflect on their experiences. We discussed with management ways to further develop learning journals, suggesting that group learning be shared mostly on the main feed so that individual progress and next steps are clearer to see. This would support a more personalised approach to each child's learning journey.

Children accessed outdoor spaces independently. We saw children enjoy spending time outside. We observed them digging in the sandpit, rolling balls down guttering, and engaging in schematic and exploratory play. As a result children experienced exciting outdoor play opportunities.

Outdoor learning was further enhanced through forest play, Book bug sessions, use of the school gym hall and grounds, and local community walks. These experiences broadened children's learning and supported a strong sense of connection to their community. One parent told us, 'The staff go above and beyond to provide enriching experiences for the children. I love that the children have so much time outside'.

Children are supported to achieve 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.

Quality Indicator: Nurturing Care and Support

Children experienced warm, nurturing relationships where staff consistently demonstrated kindness, respect, and patience. We saw staff cuddle children, offer comfort and reassurance and observed lots of happy laughter between them. Friendly greetings and positive interactions with families created a welcoming atmosphere. This meant children felt valued, included, and emotionally secure.

Staff knew children extremely well and were highly attuned to individual cues, preferences, and needs. They responded to non-verbal signals with sensitivity and reassurance. Tailored strategies, such as movement

breaks and personalised lunchtime approaches, supported emotional-regulation. As a result, children felt safe and understood.

Settling-in visits and transitions, including enhanced transitions with the school, were managed sensitively. Staff worked closely with families and school colleagues to prepare children for new experiences. This approach helped children feel confident, comfortable, and well-supported during transitions that were at a pace that was right for them.

Personal plans were in place for all children and were developed with families, containing key information about routines, interests, and care needs. This helped staff understand and support children with confidence. Additional support plans were created, using a multi agency approach to meet individual wellbeing needs. One parent commented, 'I love that the staff all know my child so well and they are really well cared for. They seem to adapt to each child's individual needs. They are really amazing'. Regular reviews and daily communication kept staff well informed, enabling each child to be nurtured and supported. During discussions with management , we suggested ways to streamline plans to ensure strategies and next steps for children were more easily accessible to staff.

Mealtimes were calm, relaxed, and unhurried. Children chose what they wanted for lunch using picture cues. One parent commented, 'There is always a great choice on offer for the children to choose from and plenty of fruit'. Opportunities to support independence were encouraged, such as self-serving, pouring drinks and helping to tidy up after lunch. Staff sat alongside children, chatting and ensuring safety while eating. Dietary needs and individual preferences were well understood, and packed lunches were managed carefully to ensure all children's choices were respected. These approaches ensured children enjoyed a positive mealtime experience with nutritious options that met their individual needs.

At snack time, a creative activity linked to the book of the month, making a "disgusting sandwich," encouraged children to explore new foods and sparked interesting conversations about how things might taste or feel. We saw children try a variety of fillings, including cheese, pickle, and beetroot. This experience supported children to develop a positive relationship with food and encouraged them to try new foods in a fun way.

Children were encouraged to use the toilet independently, with staff offering praise and support. Personal care routines were carried out with dignity and respect, and changing spaces were thoughtfully designed to reflect children's needs.

Medication procedures were in place, with medication stored safely, reviewed regularly, and recorded with parental consent. Staff were knowledgeable about children's allergies and health plans, ensuring they remained safe, healthy, and well supported.

Staff were confident in their safeguarding responsibilities. They had completed child protection training and worked closely with other professionals when required. Detailed chronologies helped staff plan and respond sensitively to children's individual needs and regular wellbeing conversations strengthened relationships with families. These practices ensured children were well protected and kept safe from harm.

Children and families were at the heart of the service. Staff valued strong connections with families and the wider community. Book bug sessions, forest visits, stay-and-play events, and an open-door approach helped families feel welcome and involved. The parent committee and community partners worked closely with staff, sharing a collective approach to getting it right for the children.

Parents shared their experiences, saying, 'Gartocharn is a very special nursery', 'The nursery is like a big family and parents are encouraged to be involved as much as the children', and 'Going to Gartocharn is like being part of a community rather than just daily drop off and pick up'. As a result, these strong connections and sense of belonging created a warm, supportive environment where children, families, and staff felt valued and included, and were supported to flourish.

Complaints

Please see Care Inspectorate website (www.careinspectorate.com) for details of complaints about the service which have been upheld.

Detailed evaluations

Leadership	5 - Very Good
Leadership and management of staff and resources	5 - Very Good
Children play and learn	5 - Very Good
Playing, learning and developing	5 - Very Good
Children are supported to achieve	5 - Very Good
Nurturing care and support	5 - Very Good

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