

Happy Faces Nursery Day Care of Children

21-27 Calside Road
Dumfries
DG1 4HA

Telephone: 01387 248 944

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
11 December 2025

Service provided by:
Lesley Woodhouse and Jean Robison,
a Partnership

Service provider number:
SP2004006218

Service no:
CS2003013472

About the service

Happy Faces Nursery is a day care of children service in the town of Dumfries, in Dumfries and Galloway. The service is registered to provide a service for 54 children at any one time. Of those 54: no more than 24 are aged under 3, of whom no more than 9 are aged under 12 months and; no more than 30 are aged 3 to those not yet of primary school age, of whom no more than 18 are of school age.

The service works in partnership with the local authority providing funded early learning and childcare sessions.

The service is close to local primary schools, shops, parks, and other amenities. Children have access to multiple playrooms and an enclosed outdoor play area.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 8 and 9 December 2025. This 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 throughout the inspection year. To inform our evaluation we:

- spoke with children during their play
- received 14 completed questionnaires from parent/carers and seven from staff
- spoke with staff and the management team
- 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

- Outstanding leadership of staff and resources supported children to reach their full potential.
- An exceptionally strong emphasis on staff wellbeing resulted in a confident, motivated team.
- Children experienced consistently high quality play and learning.
- Planning, assessment and tracking were robust and responsive.
- Children experienced consistently warm, nurturing and responsive care.
- Strong personal planning and collaborative relationships with families ensured children received individualised support.

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	6 - Excellent
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 6 - Excellent

Quality Indicator: Leadership and management of staff and resources

We evaluated this quality indicator as excellent where aspects of performance were outstanding and sector leading.

An exceptional level of leadership created a collaborative environment where staff felt supported and motivated to do their best work. Leadership was shared across the whole team, with staff taking on a variety of roles that empowered them and built confidence. Sector leading approaches to supporting staff helped develop a confident, skilled workforce and supported strong continuity of care. As a result, children experienced improved outcomes through consistent relationships with staff who were well trained, well supported and able to provide high quality experiences.

The manager had developed an innovative, research based 'generational understanding' programme to address staffing challenges they felt were common within the sector. This approach helped different generations of staff work well together and led to improved staff retention. It had a positive impact on the team, with clearer communication, stronger teamwork and a more supportive working environment. Staff at every level were respected for the skills they contributed to the team. Due to the success of the programme, the manager was now sharing this work with other settings and the local authority.

Staff benefitted from regular, high quality training opportunities, ensuring they were skilled to a high standard. The leadership team was highly proactive in keeping up to date with best practice and ensured new learning was consistently and effectively shared with the whole staff team. They had an excellent understanding of how children learn and develop, and used this expertise to design and deliver training programmes to all staff. These approaches ensured the team had the knowledge, confidence and skills to provide high-quality experiences and outcomes for children.

The leadership team invested in staff from their very first day. A detailed, well structured and tailored induction package enabled mentors to fully support new staff. This allowed new team members to learn from experienced colleagues. These approaches strengthened staff confidence and ensured new staff felt well prepared for their role. As a result, children experienced smoother, more secure transitions.

The service placed significant emphasis on staff wellbeing and showed a clear commitment to creating and sustaining a positive staff experience. Staff benefitted from regular five minute chats and wellbeing check ins. The service had introduced a designated Wellbeing Officer role, undertaken by an experienced practitioner. The manager ensured this role was fully supported and appropriately trained, including access to Mental Health First Aid and ACAS training, enabling the Wellbeing Officer to provide informed and effective support to the team. This proactive and structured approach reflected strong, values based leadership and clear investment in staff wellbeing. This fully aligned with safer staffing expectations and best practice.

Self evaluation and improvement planning were deeply embedded in the life of the service, with well established processes sustained over a long period of time. Children, families and staff were highly involved, playing an active and influential role in shaping and driving ongoing improvement. Continuous improvement was a consistent, year round feature, with all staff contributing meaningfully to reflective practice and forward planning. This demonstrated the leadership team's exceptional commitment to ensuring staff felt valued, respected and central to the service's success. Staff were fully empowered to lead improvements, such as developing enhanced sleep policies and procedures. This had led to high-quality experiences and outcomes for children.

Quality assurance processes were robust, rigorous and long established, ensuring high standards were consistently maintained. All staff were fully involved and empowered through opportunities such as peer observations, continuous monitoring and regular environmental audits. Leaders had an excellent strategic overview of these processes, completing termly 'operation and quality' checks and producing detailed reports on health and safety, including risk, accidents, incidents and medication. These checks and reports directly informed improvements and clearly demonstrated the positive impact of changes made. This reflected a strong and sustained commitment to ensuring and maintaining the highest quality of care for children.

Children experienced a nurturing, rights based environment shaped by the nursery's values and strong 'family' ethos. These were fully embedded in daily practice. We observed practitioners consistently modelling these values through their own behaviour and by supporting children to be kind, patient and respectful. Staff were proud of their 'family' ethos, which was evident in the warm, caring way they spoke about the nursery and in their interactions with children and each other. This created a strong sense of belonging and trust, enabling children to form positive, secure relationships.

Children play and learn 5 - Very Good

Quality Indicator: Playing, learning and developing

Children were happy, confident and having fun with each other and staff. We saw them talking and laughing together, demonstrating strong engagement and positive relationships. They were leading their own play. The environment was arranged so children could easily access materials, choose where they wanted to play and ask for support when needed. This setup promoted independence and allowed children to learn through their own interests. A parent told us, "[the staff] respond well to children's interests - examples including getting out specific toys [my child] has talked about".

Staff planned well for the development of children's literacy and numeracy skills. For example, there were ample opportunities for children to explore letters and language through mark making, storytelling and letter matching games. There were also opportunities to develop numeracy skills, such as number matching and weighing using a two pan balance. These experiences were enhanced through a balance of child led and adult led interactions. For example, when children were attempting to write their name, they asked a practitioner to model the letters they found challenging. The practitioner supported and praised the children. Children enjoyed counting during lunch preparation and exploring shapes, which helped them deepen their understanding and feel well supported in their learning.

A blend of planned activities and free play offered children both choice and flexibility, while still providing appropriate challenge and support. For example, children engaged in role play, junk modelling and messy play. We suggested ways the service could enhance children's digital skills development. There were opportunities for children to develop curiosity and problem solving skills both indoors and outdoors, including water play, games, the mud kitchen and climbing apparatus. This approach enabled children to engage in physical exercise, develop creativity and build a broad range of skills for life and learning. Staff had extensive plans to develop the outdoor space to improve independence and opportunities for physical play. They should continue with these plans.

Children's play and learning were enriched through valuable experiences within the setting and the wider community. Parents visited the service to share information about their occupations, or to bake. This helped children make meaningful connections with the world around them. Trips to the library, local parks and nearby shops allowed children to explore different environments and apply their learning in real life situations. These varied experiences supported children to build confidence and resilience as they adapted to new places and routines, contributing positively to their overall learning and development.

For children attending after school they were well supported by kind and caring staff. They supported children's development through warm, skilled interactions. Children were encouraged to support each other, helping them build confidence and develop new skills. Encouragement from staff meant some children joined local groups and took part in community projects, giving them valuable opportunities to experience different aspects of their wider community. Positive and nurturing relationships meant children wanted to be near staff, which made it easy for staff to extend learning, respond to children's interests and support their development effectively.

The service had developed effective planning approaches that were clearly tailored to the needs of children of all ages. Planning was consistently informed by children's interests and ideas, with children meaningfully involved in evaluating their learning. Children's achievements were recorded in a positive way that celebrated their successes and built self esteem. Children's progress was clearly recorded and used effectively to plan next steps. This ensured children made progress in their learning. As a result, children experienced rich, engaging play that was well matched to their needs, helping them make sustained progress and develop confidence as capable, active learners.

Children are supported to achieve 5 - Very Good

Quality Indicator: Nurturing care and support

Children experienced kind, nurturing and responsive care. Staff were highly attuned to children's cues, recognising when they were thirsty or tired, and offering cuddles and reassurance when needed. Staff responded very well to children's emotional needs, planning in the moment to support them effectively. This promoted children's wellbeing and sense of security, helping them feel valued and loved.

Children experienced mealtimes that were positive and meaningful learning opportunities. Mealtimes were sociable, and children provided feedback on the lunch options. This helped them develop their social skills. Children were encouraged to be independent, while staff remained well positioned to support when required. Some children chose to be 'table helpers', demonstrating the manners and life skills they had learned as they served and supported each other. This meant mealtimes were safe, enjoyable and supported children to build confidence and independence.

Personal care was carried out in a way that respected children's privacy and dignity. Practitioners talked to children throughout, ensuring personal care was carried out sensitively. This created a relaxed and calm environment. Children were supported to maintain good hygiene, including regular handwashing and using a 'face wiping station'. These approaches helped children develop positive hygiene habits and an understanding of how to look after themselves.

There were comfortable places for rest and relaxation. Staff were knowledgeable about safe sleep. A practitioner had developed a research based guidance document to support consistent practice across the team. Children looked comfortable as they slept and were supported to wake up at their own pace. As a result, children experienced a calm, nurturing sleep routine that supported their overall wellbeing and readiness to engage in play and learning.

Children's wellbeing and development were supported through strong personal planning. Each child had their own 'special book' capturing key information about their likes, interests, needs and targets. These were completed in consultation with families and updated regularly so they reflected children's current needs. Support strategies were recorded where required. Children had a strong sense of ownership of these books, and we saw older children adding photographs and drawings throughout our visit. The plans enabled staff to provide individualised care and support, helping children achieve their full potential. The personal planning system was new, and we encouraged the service to continue developing and embedding this approach.

The service had strong, trusting relationships with families. All parents spoke positively about staff. They told us they felt well informed about nursery life through face to face conversations, the 'Family' app, phone calls and newsletters. A parent told us staff were, "always approachable, kept us informed, feel like they really care for my child". These connections were further strengthened through family engagement sessions such as 'stay and play' and 'the Christmas swap' (which allowed parents to donate and swap pre-loved items). These approaches supported families to feel valued and included, fostering strong and collaborative relationships.

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	6 - Excellent
Leadership and management of staff and resources	6 - Excellent
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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