

The Nursery at St Margaret's Day Care of Children

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Aberdeen
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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
28 November 2025

Service provided by:
St. Margaret's School for Girls
(Incorporated)

Service provider number:
SP2003003560

Service no:
CS2003016173

About the service

The Nursery at St Margaret's is registered to provide a day care of children service to a maximum of 40 children between three years of age to those not yet attending primary school at any one time. The service is situated within St Margaret's School for Girls.

Children have access to two playrooms, two bathrooms, and a designated outdoor space at the rear of the building. Children also make use of various spaces within the school, including the dining hall, GP room, and outdoor playground.

The service is on a bus route and is near to shops, parks, and other amenities.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 26 November 2025 between 09:05 and 16:15 and 27 November 2025 between 08:00 and 16:50. 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, 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 three of their parents/carers
- received six responses to our request for feedback from parents/carers and staff through our online questionnaire
- 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.

As part of this inspection we undertook a focus area. We have 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 kind and nurturing interactions from staff who knew them well.
- Positive relationships had been developed with families who felt welcomed into the service.
- Children benefitted from carefully planned experiences, both within and beyond the setting.
- Staff were flexible and worked together to meet children's individual needs.
- Self evaluation helped inform developments within the service.
- Strong connections to the school and wider community promoted children's sense of belonging.

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	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 4 – Good

Quality indicator: Leadership and management of staff and resources

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.

The service's vision, values, and aims were clear, relevant, and evident in daily practice. These were displayed on a noticeboard which supported families to know what to expect from the service. Staff consistently worked in ways that reflected their aims and values, including creating strong partnerships with families and promoting a child-centred environment. Positive relationships with families and well planned experiences for children demonstrated that the service's goals guided everyday decisions and supported good outcomes for children.

Children and their families' views were valued and used to inform developments. Feedback was gathered through a variety of ways, including face-to-face discussions, questionnaires, and information sessions. Actions taken as a result were communicated clearly to families to support them in feeling listened to. Planning approaches, including mind maps of children's ideas, were used to capture their interests. This promoted a collaborative approach to influencing change within the service.

Positive experiences for children were promoted through quality assurance processes. A working quality assurance calendar outlined key tasks, such as audits, policy updates, and staff performance reviews with management. Staff were evaluating against best practice guidance to support identifying strengths and improvement priorities. This helped to inform a realistic and achievable improvement plan. We identified that there was further scope to embed the use of 'Quality Improvement Framework for the Early Learning and Childcare Sectors'. This would further promote good outcomes for children through staff involvement in self evaluation. It was evident that some improvements had positively impacted on children's experiences, including revised mealtime routines and increased parental engagement. To sustain progress, the service should set clear timescales and define measurable outcomes focused on children's experiences. This would support the celebration of success, make progress more visible, and ensure timely adjustments are made to drive the cycle of continuous improvement.

The provider, manager, and staff engaged fully in the inspection process and were responsive to feedback. Although there had been a temporary change of manager, the permanent manager had recently returned. The whole team remained committed to the ongoing development of the service. Parents commented positively on being meaningfully involved in the development of the service. One parent advised, "We are kept well informed of nursery developments and information". Leaders were confident in planned improvements but acknowledged time was needed to embed changes and measure their impact on children's outcomes. Staff felt well supported through regular team and individual meetings, enabling them to share views and contribute to service development. These approaches positioned the team to continue improving the service in line with children's evolving needs.

A supportive induction process for new members of staff helped them grow in confidence and become competent in their role. Staff received an information pack which detailed key information about the service. The most recently recruited staff spoke positively about their induction and valued opportunities to connect with children and become familiar with routines. We signposted the provider to the 'Early Learning and Childcare National Induction Resource' to encourage reflection and identify further training needs, where

appropriate. We highlighted the benefits of introducing peer monitoring to strengthen the sharing of practice, enhancing skills, and promote consistency across the team.

Children play and learn 4 – Good

Quality indicator: 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.

Children were actively engaged in experiences that reflected their interests. These included imaginative role play, construction, sensory tray, and arts and crafts as well as exploring water play. When asked what they enjoyed most, children spoke confidently about dancing, reading stories, and outdoor play. These experiences promoted creativity, problem-solving, and social interaction.

Children were motivated and confident in leading their play. They moved freely between spaces, supporting independence and decision-making. Planned activities, such as music sessions and outings, were carefully arranged to support children's engagement in free-flow play. Outdoor spaces offered opportunities for creativity and risky play, such as balancing on crates and using the mud kitchen. Children were supported to assess risks and discuss safety, building resilience and confidence. To maximise these benefits, the service should ensure children have consistent free-flow access to outdoor play across the day. This would further support children directing their play and sustaining their engagement.

Play and learning experiences were enriched through strong links with the school and wider community. Regular visits to spaces, such as the library, care home, and local shops, broadened experiences and supported hands-on learning. Within the school, children confidently accessed different rooms and engaged in meaningful activities, including baking with the school chef and science opportunities. These experiences strengthened children's connection to their community, promoted confidence, and deepened their understanding of the wider world. Parents valued these links, with one parent sharing they felt the most positive aspect was "being part of the wider school community, feeling of belonging to something bigger".

Planning approaches balanced intentional and responsive experiences, ensuring children accessed opportunities to build independence and life skills. Regular team planning meetings supported consistency, while sharing learning through newsletters and virtual platforms enabled families to extend learning at home. Children demonstrated meaningful ownership of their individual learning journals. They used these to reflect on previous experiences and take pride in their achievements. The service had also introduced a floor book and tracking tool to document children's learning, alongside their thoughts and ideas. Strengthening spontaneous observations and ensuring next steps are consistently followed will help evidence progress more effectively. This was an area the service had already identified and plans were in place to address this.

Staff interactions were positive and mostly responsive to children's interests. This provided opportunities to extend children's learning. For example, staff modelled using fact books to explore children's questions, promoting curiosity and problem-solving. Whilst staff demonstrated skills in questioning and challenging thinking, this was not yet consistently implemented. This resulted in some missed opportunities to build on children's interests and deepen learning. Strengthening these strategies across all experiences will ensure children's ideas are extended and their thinking challenged more consistently.

Language, literacy, and numeracy were meaningfully embedded in play. Children enjoyed reading stories with adults, both spontaneously and in small groups, and engaged in mark-making activities such as spelling their names with magnetic letters. Environmental print in role play areas supported early literacy, while board games and smartboard activities introduced numeracy concepts like patterns. These experiences promoted early language, literacy, and numeracy skills appropriate to children's age and stage of development and enhanced opportunities for exploration and problem-solving. Parents valued the play-based learning experiences, with one commenting, "[my child] is encouraged to be fully independent and learns through playing and having fun".

Children are supported to achieve 5 - Very Good

Quality indicator: 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 experienced warm, trusting relationships with staff who knew them well. Children were greeted warmly on arrival and those needing extra support were sensitively helped to settle through activities they enjoyed. Staff consistently spent time engaging with children, offering conversation and reassurance. Staff interactions were consistently kind and respectful. These approaches promoted a strong sense of security and belonging, enabling children to feel confident and ready to learn.

Families felt welcomed and valued within the setting. Staff made time to share updates and respond to questions, strengthening trust and continuity of care. Parents described staff as "approachable" and "friendly" and children shared staff were "fun" and "nice". Parents appreciated opportunities to participate in children's experiences through events, such as reading breakfasts and workshops, which supported home links and enhanced outcomes for children. This collaborative approach promoted an inclusive ethos and supported families to be actively involved in their child's learning and wellbeing.

Children's wellbeing was supported through the effective use of personal planning. Each child had a personal plan which contained information that was specific to their individual needs and preferences. These were reviewed regularly with parents, which ensured information was kept up-to-date. Staff had a good knowledge of children's plans, which they had identified as a key strength of the service. Where relevant, they sought advice from other professionals and welcomed multi-agency working. Where children required additional support, specific strategies were carefully planned to ensure their needs were fully met. This promoted consistency in supporting children's individual needs.

Daily routines and transitions were well planned to promote children's confidence and support them feeling secure. Calm spaces, soft lighting, and thoughtfully planned resources promoted children's sense of belonging and emotional wellbeing. Daily routines, including personal care and staff breaks, were organised effectively to minimise disruption to children's experiences and support continuity. When children moved between rooms or spaces, these were planned carefully, with children given clear information to support predictability. These approaches contributed to children receiving carefully planned care and support to promote their wellbeing and confidence throughout their day.

Mealtimes were sociable and unhurried. Lunch times had been carefully considered and adaptations made to ensure these met the needs of all children. Overall, lunch was well organised, where children were offered nutritious food in the school dining hall and had opportunities to be independent. Staff sat consistently with

children, role-modelling positive behaviours and promoting safety and social skills. Children were also able to access fresh water throughout the day to support them in staying hydrated. These practices ensured children's experiences were relaxed, enjoyable, and meaningful to learning.

Staff demonstrated strong understanding of their role in keeping children safe. Embedded practices and knowledge of best practice guidance, including the Care Inspectorate's 'SIMOA - Keeping Children Safe' campaign, were implemented effectively. Staff were confident in identifying, recording, and reporting safeguarding concerns, ensuring timely action. A robust procedure for documenting significant events and follow-up actions supported continuity of care and promoted 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	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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