

Lairhillock School Nursery Day Care of Children

Lairhillock
Netherley
Stonehaven
AB39 3QS

Telephone: 01569 690 485

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
21 January 2026

Service provided by:
Aberdeenshire Council

Service provider number:
SP2003000029

Service no:
CS2006138864

About the service

Lairhillock School Nursery is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 30 children, aged from three years to not yet attending primary school.

The nursery is situated within Lairhillock Primary School in the rural area of Netherley, Aberdeenshire. Children are cared for in an open plan playroom with access to a kitchen and bathroom. The children have direct access from the playroom to an enclosed outdoor play area. They also make use of facilities within the school grounds including dining hall, playing field, and allotment.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 19 January 2026 between 09:15 and 16:15 and 20 January 2026 between 09:00 and 16:30. 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 four of their parents/carers
- received 15 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 warm and nurturing interactions from staff who knew them well.
- Children were happy, busy, and engaged in their play.
- Daily access to outdoors supported children's health and wellbeing.
- Staff promoted children's interests and natural curiosity through high quality play experiences.
- Children and families benefitted from a service committed to continuous improvement.
- Staff built strong relationships with families, supporting meaningful connections.

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

Quality indicator: Leadership and management of staff and resources

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**.

The service's shared vision, values, and aims were clearly reflected in daily practice and displayed for families to understand what to expect. Children and families were meaningfully involved in shaping the service through daily consultation, questionnaires, and informal feedback. Staff routinely used children's views to inform experiences and parents valued opportunities to be involved. One commented, "Parents are really encouraged to be a part of the nursery experience".

Self evaluation was embedded within staff practice, contributing towards positive outcomes for children. Staff were naturally reflective and becoming increasingly confident using the 'Quality improvement framework for early learning and childcare sectors' to evaluate and improve their practice. Quality assurance processes were robust, with audits of key documents and supervision supporting consistent and effective practice. This supported a clear focus of improving outcomes for children.

Children benefitted from a staff team who were motivated to continue developing the service. The manager and staff team engaged fully in the inspection process and were responsive to feedback, taking immediate action where relevant. Staff shared that they felt well supported by leaders and their team. As a result, they felt confident in their roles and meaningfully involved in working towards shared goals. Improvement focuses included developing individual learning plans for those who required targeted support and utilising professional development opportunities. Evaluations were ongoing to measure the impact of developments on outcomes for children. The management team had identified the need to set shorter-term targets within their long-term goals. This would support the celebration of success, make progress more visible, and ensure timely adjustments are made to drive the cycle of continuous improvement.

Distributed leadership was well established, with staff confidently leading areas aligned to their strengths. This empowered practitioners and enhanced the quality of children's experiences. Team meetings were used effectively to review priorities and evaluate their impact on children. Staff were committed to ongoing professional learning, continually developing their skills to improve outcomes. Plans were in place for staff to have more opportunities to share learning and enhance practice. We discussed the benefits of reflecting on professional learning over time to support the ongoing evaluation of the impact on children's experiences.

The service was appropriately staffed, with effective deployment ensuring children's needs were consistently met. Staff were flexible in their approach, providing responsive support and engaging meaningfully in children's play. They applied best practice guidance to strengthen children's experiences, including embedding strategies from the Care Inspectorate's 'SIMOA - Keeping children safe' campaign. Children contributed to safety routines through carrying out checks and head counts, supported by visual prompts on external doors. This meant that children were cared for in a safe and secure environment.

A supportive induction process enabled new staff to build confidence and become competent in their roles. Staff benefitted from having time to learn routines and reflect on their practice, helping identify further

training needs. Detailed policies based on current guidance set clear expectations and promoted consistent, high quality practice.

Children play and learn 5 – Very Good

Quality indicator: Playing, learning and developing

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 were busy and engaged in their play. They experienced a range of opportunities that supported their interests and development. Indoors, children were engaged in construction, messy play, and arts and crafts. While outdoors, they worked cooperatively to transport materials around the garden and explored puddles. Staff were responsive to children's interests by providing requested resources, enabling them to extend their ideas. These varied experiences promoted imagination and exploration.

Children experienced a balance of spontaneous and planned learning opportunities. Free-flow access between indoors and outdoors enabled children to choose where and how they played, building independence and confidence. Optional activities such as 'mindful movement', 'Teddy talk' stories, sewing, baking, and gardening provided additional challenge and were well received by children. Staff monitored children's engagement and progress across these experiences to inform future planning and ensure activities continued to reflect children's interests.

Planning approaches were responsive and clearly informed by children's needs and interests. Staff used tracking tools effectively to identify gaps in learning and plan experiences that supported children's progression. Individualised observations were shared with parents and regular audits helped strengthen consistency and breadth. These observations identified children's skills and relevant next steps appropriate to their stage of development. Plans were in place to further support the consistent follow up of next steps, where required, to ensure children remain challenged in their learning.

Children had ownership of their learning and were supported to recognise their achievements. Staff showed genuine interest in significant moments and children revisited their learning and experiences through reviewing their online journals and contributions to floor books. This helped them reflect on their experiences and build confidence in their progress. Parents spoke positively about the quality of information shared. One commented, "Planning is evidenced and shared on the nursery planning board showing examples of how the staff have planned activities in connection with conversations/learning experiences from individual children". Another shared, "The nursery provide termly update meetings on our child's progression and development". This strong communication ensured families were well informed and involved in their child's learning.

A range of resources encouraged children to use their natural curiosity and creativity. Resources were set up in an inviting way, which acted as provocations for children's play, including real life and open-ended materials. For example, mirrors placed near craft areas allowed children to explore their features and expressions, while guttering supported experimenting and problem solving in water play. Areas had been carefully considered to promote children's engagement, which meant that children were challenged and stimulated.

Staff interactions were supportive and helped promote a fun and relaxed atmosphere. Effective use of questioning by staff helped encourage curiosity, widen children's skills and consolidate learning. Children

also developed life skills through daily experiences, including food preparation and tidying up resources. Literacy and numeracy were naturally embedded in play through stories, songs, board games, and digital activities. Staff extended children's interests by providing relevant resources, such as measuring tapes to support exploration and develop early numeracy skills.

Children's experiences were widened through connections to the community. Parents spoke positively about well organised trips, including opportunities to use public transport. Children also benefitted from utilising spaces within the school, such as the allotment. The staff team were committed to strengthening these opportunities through working with families to continue to explore opportunities for community involvement.

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 nurturing and caring interactions from staff. This supported them to feel comfortable and settled within the service. They were given regular reassurance and encouragement. For example, when carrying out personal care, staff ensured children were given the time and support they needed. These positive interactions supported the development of children's confidence and attachment to staff. Families commented positively on the relationships that their children had developed with staff, with one advising, "All the staff are friendly and helpful and make my child feel welcome every morning". Children described staff as "kind" and "nice".

Meaningful opportunities supported families to feel welcomed and involved within the service. Staff made time to share daily updates and respond to questions, strengthening trust and continuity of care. Most parents advised they felt welcomed into the setting and appreciated opportunities to participate in children's experiences through different events. These included stay-and-play days and community cafés with relevant professionals. This collaborative approach supported home links and enhanced outcomes for children.

Children's wellbeing was supported through effective personal planning. Parents felt involved and informed, with regular reviews helping keep plans up-to-date. One parent commented, "We get regular one-to-ones with the key worker to discuss and see child's progress". Another advised, "All staff show care and consideration to our child's daily needs and wellbeing". Staff were knowledgeable about children's plans and welcomed multi-agency working. Where children had specific additional support needs there was a more targeted support plan in place. We suggested breaking down the information further and having an overview of the key details. This would support evaluating progress and planning next steps for individual children's needs.

Embedded routines helped children understand what to expect throughout the day, building their confidence and independence. Calm and sociable snack and mealtime routines supported positive eating habits, with staff modelling safe and healthy behaviours. Continuous access to fresh water enabled children to stay hydrated, promoting their overall health and wellbeing.

Children's emotional wellbeing was effectively supported through carefully considered areas. Indoor and outdoor spaces had been created which were calm and quieter, also providing a breakaway space for smaller

group activities. Children confidently used the 'feelings tree' to share how they felt, enabling staff to respond when needed. Children shared the strategies that helped them manage their emotions, telling us, "Big feelings are ok", "Can talk to adults", and "Take a deep breath in, then a deep breath out", demonstrating that their emotional wellbeing was well recognised and supported.

Children's safety and wellbeing were strengthened by staff's understanding of how to identify, record, and report safeguarding concerns. Planned improvements to chronologies will support clearer follow up recording and provide further assurances of children's safety.

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	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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