

ACE

Day Care of Children

Annan Community Centre
St. John's Road
Annan
DG12 6AP

Telephone: 01461 205 953

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
15 January 2026

Service provided by:
Annan Community Education Project
Management Committee

Service provider number:
SP2003002739

Service no:
CS2003011682

About the service

ACE is a day care service for children, close to transport links, shops and other community services. The service is registered to care for a maximum of 24 children aged 2 years to primary school age of whom no more than five may be under 3 years or a maximum of 15 children 2 to 3 years.

ACE Playgroup is in partnership with the local authority to provide early learning and childcare. The service is provided from Annan Community Centre, which is situated in the grounds of Annan Academy. When the service is open, they have the sole use of the main hall and the use of the committee room. There is a small outdoor area where children can enjoy being outside.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 13 and 14 January, with feedback being given on 15 January 2026. 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:

- spoke with children using the service and members of their family
- spoke with all staff and management
- observed practice and children's experiences
- reviewed documents

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.

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.

Key messages

- Children were settled, happy and confident, benefitting from warm, trusting relationships with staff that created a nurturing and secure environment.
- Parents and families were warmly welcomed, and children had opportunities to explore the local community through visits and visitors.
- Staff knew the children very well and used this knowledge effectively to support choices, communication and emotional reassurance.
- Children were engaged and having fun. They moved confidently around the environment and made choices about play, forming friendships and caring for one another.
- The new planning system for learning was at an early stage, with staff developing confidence following training. Children enjoyed looking at their Learning Journeys and talking about their experiences.
- Children experienced a welcoming, respectful and supportive environment, shaped by a staff team committed to helping them grow and learn together. The setting's Vision, Values and Aims were visible and supported families to understand what they could expect from the service.
- Management and staff were committed to continuous improvement and were developing confidence in using self-evaluation and quality assurance to strengthen their work. They demonstrated openness to feedback, professional challenge and new ideas.
- The voluntary management committee was committed to strengthening parental involvement. Developing a clear procedure for continuity of governance, including steps required for forming a new committee and understanding legal responsibilities, would support sustainability.

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	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.

Children were cared for in a welcoming, respectful and supportive environment by a staff team who supported them to grow and learn together. This was clearly set out in the setting's Vision, Values and Aims statement which was on display and accessible to parents, carers and visitors. This helped families become aware of what they could expect from the setting. The statement had previously been reviewed and was now due to be updated. To promote ownership and relevance, this review process should meaningfully include children and their families so that the values continue to reflect the wishes of their community.

Management and staff were developing confidence in self-evaluation and the role of quality assurance processes in supporting the continuous improvement of their setting. They demonstrated a strong commitment to delivering high quality care and were open to ideas, feedback and professional challenge.

A quality assurance calendar was in place, outlining planned audits and monitoring activities, including reviews of personal plans and audits of accidents and incidents. These processes helped identify changes, such as adjustments to the environment following accidents. Staff practice was monitored mainly through informal observations, with some formal and peer observations in place. We discussed ways of strengthening these, including clear focuses for formal observations, and ensuring these link directly to the improvement plan, appraisal and professional learning, as well as the settings Vision, Values and Aims.

The manager planned to implement a programme of appraisal and support for all staff. We discussed adopting shorter, more frequent sessions to better monitor progress on learning targets and support ongoing development. Staff training was well supported, and all staff had access to opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge.

Management and staff were becoming more familiar with the new self-evaluation framework, and self-evaluation was now a regular part of team-meeting discussions, ensuring that all staff could contribute. Feedback from families was gathered through online surveys and we suggested additional ways to involve parents. Parents confirmed that they "receive updates and information through email, social media and text message" and confirmed that they had "completed questionnaires to help develop the nursery". Children's views were sought through questionnaires and informal discussions, with some recorded in a big book.

Management welcomed support from peers and the local authority as they developed their improvement planning. We highlighted further Care Inspectorate resources that could strengthen this work. An improvement plan was in place, informed by previous improvement priorities, self-evaluation, observations and feedback from staff and families. Whilst the improvement plan was available in a folder and displayed on the wall, creating a simpler summary, such as a parent-friendly notice showing the priorities and current progress, would help make it more accessible.

The setting was provided by a voluntary management committee, who were keen to increase opportunities for parents to be involved. We have advised the committee to develop a clear procedure outlining how the service will continue to operate, including steps for forming a new committee, the support available to them and required legal actions. We have also suggested that they seek further guidance from organisations who support the voluntary sector.

Staff recruitment followed safer recruitment guidance, with required checks completed before staff began work. Staff worked very well as a team and supported one another, with some wellbeing measures in place, including open access to management for support. Recruitment currently sat with the committee, and we agreed that the manager should contribute to these decisions. We have also suggested that involving children and parents more formally in recruitment processes would strengthen them.

Observations showed that staff were caring, kind and had developed warm, trusting relationships with children and with each other. Staff were attentive and responsive, moving around the room to ensure children were consistently supported and supervised.

Children play and learn 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.

Children were having fun as they played, and we observed lots of laughter and enjoyment. Children moved confidently around their environment, particularly indoors and were making choices about activities and who to play with. They were forming friendships and learning to care for one another, for example helping their friends during play.

The environment was secure and spacious, with different play areas which enabled children to move freely and engage in a range of experiences. Staff were responsive and provided warm, well-timed support, helping children follow their interests and meet their needs.

Children had opportunities to develop a variety of skills. Numeracy had clearly been a recent focus, with staff encouraging counting, sorting and number recognition during play, such as a game matching frogs to lily pads. Children had also helped to make playdough and had previously taken part in baking; we discussed reintroducing this to support early science and practical life skills.

Staff encouraged communication by talking with children, modelling language and describing actions to build vocabulary. Children were supported to express themselves and were encouraged to use books to find information. While there were no electronic devices available, staff told us that they used the nursery phone to research information when needed. Staff had plans to attend further training to strengthen their communication and language practice.

Staff encouraged children to develop independence, praising their efforts and supporting them to try new things. They helped children recognise and manage their emotions, which promoted resilience. Some staff had attended Think Equal training; extending this across the team would strengthen consistency in emotional literacy work.

Children had opportunities to be creative and to problem-solve, with a well-resourced construction area. This would be enhanced by adding mark-making materials, environmental print and numeracy prompts to support early literacy and numeracy. When planning, we have suggested that staff should more consistently consider real-life contexts for learning, ensuring literacy and numeracy opportunities are built naturally into topics and play areas.

Children had opportunities to develop both fine and gross motor skills, particularly fine motor through playdough, threading and construction. On the first day of our visit, we found that children did not go

outside and we noted that some children appeared to need more energetic, physical activity. Staff introduced a music and movement session on the second day, which most children participated in and appeared to enjoy. Ensuring planned indoor physical activity especially when outdoor play is not possible, would support children's need for movement.

We observed that children could easily access most resources and able to transport them around the nursery to follow through their own ideas. We discussed adopting a more flexible hub approach so that resources are intentionally stored for use in different play areas. Staff recognised that resourcing was an ongoing area for improvement, particularly in relation to increasing sensory experiences and providing more materials for two year old children.

Children were supported to learn about keeping safe through activities with SIMOA the elephant and by learning about road safety whilst out on walks. Children were occasionally involved in reviewing risk assessments and we advised that doing this more regularly would develop children's understanding of managing risk further.

A new planning system for children's learning had recently been introduced and was at an early stage. Staff had attended relevant training, including Realising the Ambition, and were developing confidence in putting this into practice. All children had My Learning Journey folders, and we saw that some children enjoyed looking at these independently. Keyworkers recorded weekly observations for their focus children, evaluating their observations and identifying next steps. We suggested that adding space for children's own comments would strengthen this. Monitoring should ensure that this format is being used consistently for all children to ensure that all staff can support children's progress and next steps.

Children are supported to achieve 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.

Children were settled, happy and confident in the nursery. They had developed warm, trusting relationships with staff, who valued the time taken to build attachments. This had helped to create a nurturing and welcoming atmosphere where children felt safe and secure.

Many of the children attending were very young and had variable attendance patterns. Older children who attended more regularly were beginning to form friendships and were learning to share and negotiate during the day. Staff responded sensitively to children, listening carefully and observing their interests. They knew individual children very well and used this knowledge to support interactions and choices. Communication aids such as cards were used effectively, and staff may benefit from exploring additional approaches, like signing, to support all children to communicate their needs. Children confidently sought comfort and support, and staff engaged respectfully, for example by asking for permission before personal care tasks.

Children were encouraged to develop independence and life skills, for example by putting on coats and serving food and drinks. Mealtimes were calm, sociable experiences with a variety of healthy and nutritious foods being provided. Children were supported to try new foods and eat as much as they needed. While staff sat with children and led conversations, we have suggested that modelling good practice like sitting whilst eating would help children further.

We made some suggestions about improving the structure and flow of the day, so that children are helped

to understand routines and changes, like mealtimes. Staff used music to support children settling in, and children liked to suggest a variety of different types. Settling in was paced around children's needs, and we suggested that staff may find it helpful to re-introduce an All About Me to gather further information about comforters. Transition arrangements for children moving to school were in place.

Staff met regularly to plan for children and share information. All children had personal plans containing required information and well-being based strategies. Additional documents, like chronologies, were included where relevant. Staff worked well with other professionals, and we agreed that creating a calm, sensory area would support all children.

Staff had completed relevant child protection training and demonstrated a good understanding of their responsibilities. Regular scenario based discussions may help strengthen confidence in responding to more complex situations.

The environment was clean, though some areas, such as toilets, were worn and would benefit from upgrading. Staff promoted good hygiene, and introducing a nose blowing station in the playroom would support children's independence. Ensuring paper towels are positioned close to messy play areas would help maintain safe and hygienic practice.

Parents and families were welcomed daily and through events such as Stay and Play sessions and Mother's Day afternoon tea. Children had some opportunities to explore their community through visits and visitors, such as to the local fire and police stations.

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	4 - Good
Nurturing care and support	4 - Good

To find out more

This inspection report is published by the Care Inspectorate. You can download this report and others from our website.

Care services in Scotland cannot operate unless they are registered with the Care Inspectorate. We inspect, award grades and help services to improve. We also investigate complaints about care services and can take action when things aren't good enough.

Please get in touch with us if you would like more information or have any concerns about a care service.

You can also read more about our work online at www.careinspectorate.com

Contact us

Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

enquiries@careinspectorate.com

0345 600 9527

Find us on Facebook

Twitter: @careinspect

Other languages and formats

This report is available in other languages and formats on request.

Tha am foillseachadh seo ri fhaighinn ann an cruthannan is cànan eile ma nithear iartras.

অনুরোধসাপেক্ষে এই প্রকাশনাটি অন্য ফরম্যাট এবং অন্যান্য ভাষায় পাওয়া যায়।

یہ اشاعت درخواست کرنے پر دیگر شکلوں اور دیگر زبانوں میں فراہم کی جاسکتی ہے۔

ਬੇਨਤੀ 'ਤੇ ਇਹ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਨ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਹੋਰਨਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਉਪਲਬਧ ਹੈ।

هذه الوثيقة متوفرة بلغات ونماذج أخرى عند الطلب

本出版品有其他格式和其他語言備索。

Na życzenie niniejsza publikacja dostępna jest także w innych formatach oraz językach.