

Struthers Early Years Centre Day Care of Children

Castle Stuart Walk
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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
28 January 2026

Service provided by:
South Ayrshire Council

Service provider number:
SP2003003269

Service no:
CS2014325237

About the service

Struthers Early Years Centre is located in Troon, South Ayrshire. It is located in a purpose-built building in a site adjacent to Struthers Primary School. The service is provided by South Ayrshire Council.

The service is registered to provide a daycare of children service to a maximum of 110 children not yet attending primary school at any one time. No more than 110 are aged 2 years to those not yet attending primary school full time with no more than 20 aged 2 to under 3.

Children aged 3-5 years have access to two playrooms which can be joined through an indoor sliding partition and are joined by a secure outdoor space. Children aged 2-3 years have access to a smaller playroom with access to a section of the outdoor area. Older children can at times throughout the day freely move between indoors and outdoors. The centre is located within walking distance of local shops, parks and amenities.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 27 and 28 January 2026 between 09:00 and 17:30. 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 and complaints information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered throughout the inspection year.

To inform our evaluation we:

- Spoke and spent time with children using the service. We also spoke with three friends and family members.
- Received 22 completed questionnaires.
- Spoke with 14 staff and the management team. We also received 11 completed staff questionnaires.
- Observed practice and daily life.
- Reviewed documents.
- Spoke with two visiting professionals.

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 happy, confident and engaged, enjoying a wide range of play experiences that supported their learning and development.
- Staff were warm, caring and responsive, helping children feel safe, settled and emotionally secure throughout the day.
- The new manager brought strong, positive leadership, resulting in early improvements to routines, staff practice and the overall quality of children's experiences.
- Staff worked well together and felt supported, and although training needs were still developing, improvements were already helping to strengthen skills.
- Children's learning was becoming more child led, with staff beginning to build on children's interests and ideas during play.
- Parents valued the caring relationships staff had with their children, and ongoing work to improve communication would help families feel even more involved in their child's learning.

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

Leadership and Management of Staff and Resources

We evaluated this area as good. Several important strengths positively influenced outcomes for children, and these clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

The service operated under a clear and shared vision, 'to nurture a love of learning for all children in our community.' Staff consistently applied the values of belonging, kindness, fun and honesty in daily practice, which contributed to a positive ethos and supported children to feel safe, included and respected. The vision had been recently reviewed with families, ensuring their voices shaped the service's direction. This promoted a shared understanding and strengthened relationships with parents.

Self-evaluation was developing well. The newly appointed manager demonstrated strong capacity for improvement. They had taken purposeful action to strengthen staff skills and improve children's experiences. For example, the manager implemented focused quality assurance around lunchtime routines, resulting in a calmer, more child centred experience that supported children's independence and social development. Future improvements should continue to be supported, with senior staff recognising the key role they play in supporting and enriching improvements.

Evidence showed that improvement planning was now more robust. The interim improvement plan clearly identified actions and next steps. The manager had already progressed several previously unmet targets, demonstrating responsiveness and a commitment to raising standards. Staff had begun to identify their own strengths, priorities and passions, laying helpful foundations for distributed leadership. Staff leadership roles had recently been introduced, and although early in development, these were likely to strengthen ownership of improvements and enhance experiences for children. Continued work was needed to fully embed children's and families' involvement in ongoing evaluation and planning.

Recruitment processes were carried out centrally by the local authority, ensuring a safe and values based approach. Induction processes were in place, although further clarity around staff learning needs and support mechanisms would strengthen practice.

Staff Skills, Knowledge, Values and Deployment

We evaluated this area as good, as important strengths positively influenced outcomes for children and clearly outweighed the areas for improvement identified.

Staff interactions were warm, nurturing and promoted children's confidence. We observed a busy but calm playroom where children were relaxed, settled and able to access resources independently. Their confidence was evident in the way they moved around the environment, made choices and engaged in play. A parent told us, "I love that they know exactly how to settle my wee girl... she loves to cuddle in for a wee sleep and the staff are happy to step in so she can get a wee nap." This demonstrated the trusting relationships that supported children to feel secure and understood.

Most staff had a good understanding of child development, and this supported children to experience appropriate care and play opportunities. However, children would further benefit from staff strengthening their skills in extending learning, higher order thinking, and embedding richer play experiences. A more

robust overview of training needs would help professional learning become increasingly targeted and evidence informed. A training needs analysis for each staff member would support more consistent development of staff skills and enhance outcomes for children.

Staff told us they felt very well supported by the new manager, and we saw improved staff morale and consistency for children. Regular 1-1 meetings, appraisals and team discussions had taken place. The manager's 'learning walks' had already resulted in visible improvements, for example in lunchtime routines and block play. Continued opportunities for staff to work collaboratively to share practice, develop provocations, and plan differentiated learning, would further strengthen the quality of children's experiences.

There was a mix of experienced and newly qualified staff, all appropriately qualified and registered with the Scottish Social Services Council. This ensured staff understood and adhered to their professional responsibilities. A compassionate, responsive culture was emerging, supported by the manager's reflective practice and local authority mentoring arrangements.

Staffing levels were responsive to children's needs, and we observed high ratios that contributed to children receiving consistent attention and support. A parent shared, "There's always lots of staff about and they all know my son... it gives the impression everyone's all in it together." This contributed to children experiencing a sense of belonging and security.

Deployment patterns supported continuity across the day. To strengthen this further, the service should continue considering how daily feedback can be provided consistently by a familiar adult, ensuring parents remain well informed about their child's experiences.

The manager had begun mapping staff skills to routines, leadership roles and activities. As this becomes embedded, it was likely to result in higher quality experiences for children and families. A parent told us, "There are always lots of staff on hand to welcome him in and engage in activities." This should continue to be considered, and will highlight to families the positive impact of thoughtful deployment on children's daily transitions

Children play and learn 4 – Good

We evaluated this area as good, as several important strengths positively impacted children's play, learning and development, and clearly outweighed the areas for improvement identified.

Children were actively engaged, motivated and enjoying their play. Across the setting, we saw children confidently exploring water colour painting, block play and small world creations. Staff supported children to design and build volcanoes using blocks, and this sparked enthusiastic participation. While these experiences were positive, they would have been further enriched by the addition of provocations such as images, props or natural materials to deepen creativity and imagination. Parents told us, "So many of the staff are absolutely incredible" and, "My child's interests are taken into account", demonstrating positive relationships and a sense of personalised support, world creations.

Children had choice and freedom in their play. In the 2-3 room, staff sensitively followed children's lead, allowing them to move through their play based on their interests. Real vegetables were offered in the home corner, and staff supported children respectfully to explore these resources safely. In the 3-5 room, free flow between both indoor rooms and the outdoors supported independence and autonomy. Children accessed a

balance of indoor and outdoor learning. Despite storm conditions limiting outdoor play on one inspection day, the environment generally enabled regular outdoor access, including weekly forest school sessions.

The service was suitably resourced to provide children with a range of play and learning experiences, however staff told us they felt that more resources were required. Following discussion with the manager and provider, we were assured that staff would continue to be supported to develop their skills at using the wide range of materials on offer to them to support enriched outcomes and experiences for children.

We observed children being curious, focused and increasingly creative. Modelling using recycled materials was emerging well but would benefit from additional materials such as glue, masking tape, string or recycled packaging to support more complex creations. Block play demonstrated strong early creativity, with staff using encouraging language like, "Let's try that idea" and, "Do you think that would work?" to prompt some deeper thinking. Further interactions that extended learning were emerging. This should continue to be consistently embedded across the setting to ensure children experience challenge and higher order thinking opportunities throughout their day. Parents spoke positively about their children's confidence and social development outdoors, with one parent noting their child "loved having the opportunity of free play between indoors and outdoors."

Staff interactions were warm and respectful, and children benefitted from nurturing support tailored to their emotional needs. Transitions between rooms were thoughtfully managed, allowing younger children to return to familiar staff for reassurance.

Planning, observations and assessment were developing well under the leadership of the new manager. Staff had begun implementing a refreshed planning approach, and although observations were basic, they accurately identified interests and needs. As staff confidence grew, planning was expected to become more responsive and reflective of children's voices. Parents valued seeing learning captured, with one sharing that their child could now confidently talk about plants in the sensory garden.

Children are supported to achieve 4 - Good

Nurturing Care and Support

We evaluated this key question as good, as several important strengths positively impacted children's wellbeing and experiences and clearly outweighed the areas requiring improvement.

Children experienced warm, nurturing and respectful care from staff. We saw staff at children's level, using gentle language, maintaining eye contact and offering comfort when needed. Younger children received reassuring cuddles and sensitive responses to early cues, while older children were supported by staff who showed compassion and genuine interest in their wellbeing. One parent shared, "They really have an interest in my child..... It's so reassuring." As a result, children felt safe, valued and emotionally secure.

Care routines were not always fully reflective of children's needs. Some practices, such as one staff member carrying out all nappy changing, were more aligned with staff convenience than supporting children's attachments and emotional comfort. The manager responded positively when this was raised and committed to strengthening child centred approaches. Improvements in this area would ensure children's individual care experiences are more consistent and nurturing.

Transitions were calm, well supported and caring during the inspection visit. The rolling lunch routine was highly effective, offering a relaxed experience where children ate at their own pace. We noted this as a very good area of key improvement. Children moved confidently between spaces, and even when outdoor access was restricted due to severe weather, staff ensured indoor experiences remained engaging. Parents told us they felt confident in the setting's safety, describing monitored, secure doors and vigilant staff practice. Where previous concerns with door safety had been raised by parents, we heard that the manager had dealt with these promptly and effectively, resulting in families feeling heard and safe.

Personal plans were well maintained, regularly reviewed and increasingly child centred. They reflected children's holistic needs, interests and development, and families were actively involved. One parent described a positive review meeting. The new manager had strengthened the structure and clarity of personal plans, and as personal planning and evaluation continue to embed, children's individual progress will be further supported.

Partnerships with families were developing well, though responses from parents varied. Communication systems, including newsletters, e-learning journals and daily conversation, were used effectively, but busy drop off and collection times limited deeper discussion for some families. Parents expressed a desire for clearer contact points and more consistent daily feedback. Strengthening two way communication will further enhance trust, continuity and shared understanding of children's needs.

What the service has done to meet any requirements we made at or since the last inspection

Requirements

Requirement 1

By 6 January 2025, in order to support children's wellbeing and promote the continued development and improvement of the service, the provider must, at a minimum, ensure robust monitoring and supervision procedures are being undertaken to positively impact experiences for children.

This is to comply with Regulation 4(1)(a) of The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/210).

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes' (HSCS 4.19); and
'I use a service and organisation that are well led and managed' (HSCS 4.23).

This requirement was made on 13 September 2024.

Action taken on previous requirement

This has been achieved with input from the new manager

Met - within timescales

What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection

Areas for improvement

Previous area for improvement 1

To ensure children's health and wellbeing needs are met, there should be personal plans for every child attending the service. In order to achieve this, the management team should ensure that every child has a fully completed personal plan, created in partnership with children and parents/carers. These should continue to robustly identify the child's needs and wishes and set out how these will be met. Each individual plan should be reviewed at least once every six months whilst the child is attending the service.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'My personal plan is right for me because it sets out how my needs will be met, as well as my wishes and choices' (HSCS 1.15).

This area for improvement was made on 13 September 2024.

Action taken since then

Personal Plans were in place.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

To improve the quality of children's experiences, staff should ensure that children are meaningfully involved in leading their play and learning through a balance of planned and spontaneous experiences and resources. Children's choice should be promoted, and their learning and development extended through provocations (resources or activities that promote thoughts, creativity and learning) and skilful staff interactions.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'I can choose to have an active life and participate in a range of recreational, social, creative, physical and learning activities every day, both indoors and outdoors' (HSCS 1.25).

This area for improvement was made on 13 September 2024.

Action taken since then

This area for improvement has been met.

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
Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment	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

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