

# Lochinver Early Learning and Childcare Day Care of Children

Lochinver Primary School  
Lochinver  
IV27 4LR

Telephone: 01571 844235

**Type of inspection:**  
Unannounced

**Completed on:**  
3 February 2026

**Service provided by:**  
Highland Council

**Service provider number:**  
SP2003001693

**Service no:**  
CS2023000277

## About the service

Lochinver Early Learning and Childcare is located within the grounds of Lochinver Primary School. The service provides care to a maximum of 12 children at any one time, aged from two years to those not yet attending primary school. No more than three children under three years of age can attend at any given time.

The nursery has sole use of a building within the grounds of Lochinver Primary School. There is a small reception area, nappy and toilet facilities, and a playroom with kitchen facilities. The playroom has direct access to a fully enclosed outdoor play area which is well used by the children.

## About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Monday 2nd and Tuesday 3rd February 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:

- Observed practice and daily life
- Spoke with the children using the service
- Spoke with staff and the management team
- Reviewed documents
- Assessed core assurances, including the physical environment

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.

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

- Children were happy, confident and actively involved in leading their own play and learning.
- Staff knew their children and families well and had created a warm and welcoming environment.
- Children enjoyed relaxed, unhurried, sociable snack and meal times.
- Further work was needed to ensure the setting and resources offered children high quality play, learning and development opportunities.
- Improvement was evident in the areas identified at previous inspection. The manager and staff should continue to introduce, embed and review their work to monitor progress and achievements.

## 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	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Children are supported to achieve	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

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. We found several strengths that impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

### Leadership and management of staff and resources

The manager promoted a positive attitude to change and continuous improvement, and recognised the importance of working in partnership and involving all relevant stakeholders in self evaluation processes.

A recent review of the service's vision, values, and aims meant that they reflected the aspirations for children and their families in the community. This process involved families, staff, and children. The vision, values and aims for the service were included on the service's website, on display in the reception area and included in the nursery handbook shared with all families. Core values were updated to include safe, respectful, inclusive and fun underpinning the setting's ethos and creating a safe, welcoming environment. The manager should continue to encourage staff to reflect on these values and consider their impact on daily practice to strengthen relationships and promote shared understanding.

Staff advised that they felt actively involved in the ongoing evaluation of the service. They explained that the manager was a very regular visitor to the nursery as well as attending fortnightly team meetings with them. Staff could share any feedback and suggestions they might have. During team meetings the manager and staff reflected on practice, discussed the continuous improvement of the service and progress in meeting identified action points, and securing progression and positive outcomes for children.

Parental engagement was an ongoing priority for the manager and staff. They recognised the value of parental feedback and welcomed any suggestions as to how the service could be improved. As well as daily informal contact during drop off and pick up times, parents were invited to spend time in the nursery and share in their child's care and learning. The manager and staff were considering how to promote further opportunities for parental engagement with the nursery.

Recruitment and induction followed clear, safe practices, in line with safer recruitment guidance. New staff benefitted from a structured induction. The management demonstrated a good understanding of their responsibilities in relation to the management of staffing and resources.

## Children play and learn 3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

We evaluated this quality indicator as satisfactory/adequate where strength just outweighed the weaknesses.

### Playing, learning and developing

Since the previous inspection, there have been changes within the staff team, including natural staff turnover and temporary absences. As a small team, this had had some impact on the pace of change in relation to children playing, learning and developing.

Children were observed having fun and most were engaged, happy and motivated. There were opportunities to lead their own play and learning and they were able to free flow between the indoor and outdoor areas. For the majority of the time, children benefitted from uninterrupted play, allowing them to be engaged in their play.

Children's wellbeing was promoted through free flow access to the outdoor play area for much of the session. There was a small outdoor area where the children enjoyed running, climbing, water play, digging, mark making, ball games and using wheeled toys. Unfortunately, at the time of the inspection, the climbing frame in the centre of the of the space had been cordoned off for several weeks and would remain so until it had been checked and deemed safe.

Children were generally supported to learn and develop through play, with both planned and spontaneous opportunities. They were encouraged to take an active role in leading their play and learning. Some experiences offered were stimulating and engaging and promoted children's curiosity and imagination. There were also some opportunities for children to enhance their skills in literacy, language and numeracy. These included access to books and other printed materials in various areas, mark making, sorting and counting activities. However, the range of resources were limited, particularly outdoors. Following the previous inspection, an area for improvement was made in relation to the range of resources readily available to the children each day, both indoors and outdoors. Work was still needed to further develop the indoor and outdoor setting to ensure children are appropriately challenged and consistently experience high quality play and learning opportunities. (See area for improvement 3 in 'What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection').

Although the minimum adult to child ratio was met, the deployment and level of staffing was not always sufficient to meet the needs of the children. The approach to staffing was not always outcome focussed and did not take into account the complexity of individual children's needs. At different times of the day, staff were stretched especially if some of the children were outside or if staff had to attend to a child's personal care needs.

Staff had positive relationships with children and engaged in interactions, however, these lacked structure and challenge. This resulted in missed opportunities when skilled interactions and effective questioning could have further extended children's curiosity, problem-solving skills and promote development of imagination. This was particularly evident during busier times of the day when staff were more focussed on routine tasks. As a result, children did not experience consistently rich and meaningful learning opportunities across the day.

Following the previous inspection, an area of improvement was made in relation to planning for children's learning, and tracking and monitoring their progress. Changes within the staff team had impacted on the pace of change. The quality of observations and assessments of children's learning and development were variable and infrequent. Some observations did reflect children's learning and development however others were more descriptive and did not identify next steps in children's learning. The management explained work was ongoing to improve how they monitor and track children's learning and progression which in turn would improve planning. To facilitate learning and progression for all children, the manager should continue to support the staff team to develop their understanding, skills and confidence in relation to assessing, planning for and monitoring children's learning and development. (See area for improvement 2 in 'What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection').

There were floor books in place which were used to record children's learning. These could be strengthened to include more responsive planning based on children's inputs, interests and ideas and deepen children's learning.

## Children are supported to achieve 3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

We made an evaluation of adequate for this quality indicator, as several important strengths taken together just outweighed areas for improvement.

### Nurturing care and support

Overall, children benefitted from a warm and welcoming environment where staff interactions were nurturing, caring and responsive. Staff were kind, helping children to feel safe and settled. Appropriate comfort and reassurance was offered, supporting wellbeing. However, there were some occasions where staff did not consistently respond to children's cues or attempts to initiate interaction. This resulted in missed opportunities for engagement and limited children's ability to feel fully supported.

The previous area for improvement around personal plans had been met. The manager and staff had reviewed and developed the personal plans for each of the children attending. Personal plans were now clearer, better organised and readily accessible to staff. Plans were completed and reviewed at least every six months in consultation with parents. Chronologies were beginning to be used as meaningful working documents to support individual needs. However, further development was needed to ensure that, for some children, identified strategies remain relevant, up to date and revisited to assess effectiveness.

Transitions were flexible and supportive. Staff worked with parents to understand preferences and needs. Settling in visits were flexible and informal. Transition for children moving to school included a "whole school" approach where children spent time in the wider school and with their older peers. This helped children feel safe, secure and confident during any changes.

Children enjoyed calm, relaxed, unhurried mealtimes within the playroom at a pace which was right for them. Children were provided with meals which met their specific allergies, preferences and dietary needs. Mealtimes were used to promote independence, for example children were supported to self serve their snacks and pour drinks. We observed a calm and sociable lunchtime with the children and staff sitting together. This supported supervision, social skills and language development. Snack times could be better organised to enhance children's experiences. The service should review current practice which often resulted in staff becoming task orientated and children receiving limited supervision and interaction to enhance their experience and keep them safe. For example, they should review where snack preparation takes place so that it still allows children to be involved whilst allowing staff to have a clear view of the playroom. Fresh water was available throughout the session and children were encouraged to have regular drinks.

Since the previous inspection, work had been completed to develop the playroom, including the cosy area. This area provided children with a safe and calm space where they could safely rest or sleep. At the time of the inspection there were no children who required a nap. The staff had introduced more soft furnishing which made the space more homely, cosier, and comfortable for any children who required a nap or even just some quiet time away from the busier spaces to regulate their emotions. The staff were also in the process of developing an outdoor snug area for the children.

## 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 each child receives appropriate care and support and their needs are met, the provider, manager and staff should ensure that personal plans set out children's current needs and how they will be met.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'My personal plan (sometimes referred to as a care 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 15 January 2025.**

#### Action taken since then

As part of the inspection, we looked at the personal plans for the children in attendance. Personal plans were all completed and routinely reviewed at a minimum of every six months. There was evidence that parents had been involved in the development and review of their children's individual plans.

The management team routinely audited personal plans and other written records and continued to support staff to ensure all plans were up to date and reflected the children's current needs and how they will be met.

**This area for improvement has been met.**

#### Previous area for improvement 2

To support children to achieve, the provider should improve the approach and skills of staff in relation to planning for children's learning and tracking and monitoring their progress. Staff should be supported to develop their understanding of how to effectively observe and assess children's learning in order to plan quality learning experiences and meaningful next steps.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I am supported to achieve my potential in education and employment if this is right for me' (HSCS 1.27).

**This area for improvement was made on 15 January 2025.**

#### Action taken since then

As part of the inspection, we reviewed a sample of monitoring and observations records. We found that quality observations were not routinely being completed. Many contained only limited evaluation of children's progression and achievements, and did not include identified next steps. Observations were also not routinely being used to inform planning. The manager explained that due to changes within the staff team, progress in this area had been limited.

The manager and staff should continue to be supported to develop their skills and understanding in relation to monitoring and tracking children's learning and progress. This would add value to the children's experience and ensure they are fully supported and challenged.

**This area for improvement has not been met and will be continued.**

### Previous area for improvement 3

To promote children's continued learning, development and enjoyment, children should have access to a wide range of resources and experiences which are challenging and suitable to their individual interests and stages of development. There should be a sufficient amount of resources to enable children to make independent choices and engage in deep and meaningful play. Language, literacy and numeracy should be fully embedded across all areas of the playroom and outdoors.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state that: 'As a child, I can direct my own play and activities in the way that I choose, and freely access a wide range of experiences and resources suitable for my age and stage, which stimulate my natural curiosity, learning and creativity' (HSCS 2.27).

**This area for improvement was made on 15 January 2025.**

#### Action taken since then

We were able to see that some work had been done to improve the setting and the range of resources and experiences available to children, especially indoors. The playroom was now better organised and there was a more homely feel. Good use had been made of soft furnishings and lighting to make the room feel more cosy. There were displays of the children's work in the playroom.

The manager acknowledged that further work was still needed, especially outdoors, to extend the range of resources and experiences available to children which offered challenge and stimulated children's natural curiosity, play and learning. They were also looking to fully embed language, literacy and numeracy across the whole setting, particularly outdoors.

**This area for improvement has not been met and will be continued.**

### Previous area for improvement 4

To enable all children to be cared for in an appropriate environment that meets their needs and supports them to reach their full potential, that manager and staff should review the environment. This should include, but is not limited to, providing children with an environment that is welcoming, comfortable and homely and appropriately resourced so that they are provided with sufficient opportunities to engage meaningfully with their play and learning environments.

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

'If I experience care and support in a group, I experience a homely environment and can use a comfortable area with soft furnishings to relax' (HSCS 5.6)

And

'As a child, my social and physical skills, confidence, self-esteem and creativity are developed through a balance of organised and freely chosen extended play, including using open ended and natural materials'. (HSCS 1.31)

**This area for improvement was made on 15 January 2025.**

### Action taken since then

Since the last inspection visit, work had been completed to improve the environment. As stated previously, the playroom was more homely, welcoming and cosy. Good use had been made of soft furnishings and lighting. The layout of the room now allowed for easily identifiable areas including home corner, role play, construction area, story and cosy corner.

**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](http://www.careinspectorate.com).

Detailed evaluations

Leadership	4 - Good
Leadership and management of staff and resources	4 - Good
Children play and learn	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Playing, learning and developing	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Children are supported to achieve	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Nurturing care and support	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

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