

Shortlees Early Childhood Centre Day Care of Children

Blacksyke Avenue
Shortlees
Kilmarnock
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Telephone: 01563 533 678

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
17 February 2026

Service provided by:
East Ayrshire Council

Service provider number:
SP2003000142

Service no:
CS2003014092

About the service

Shortlees Early Childhood Centre provides a day care of children service for a maximum of 64 children who are not yet attending primary school at any one time. No more than 6 of these children may be under 2 years old, and no more than 58 may be aged 2 years to those not yet attending primary school full time, with no more than 10 aged 2 to under 3 years.

The service is provided by East Ayrshire Council and is located in a residential area within the town of Kilmarnock. It is close to local amenities, including shops and bus routes.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Monday 16 and Tuesday 17 February 2026 between 09:15 and 17:00. The 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. In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with children using the service
- received 16 completed Microsoft Forms questionnaires
- spoke with staff and the senior leadership team
- observed practice and daily life
- 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.

This information will be anonymised and analysed to help inform our future work with services.

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

- Leaders demonstrated a strong commitment to a shared vision, creating conditions where staff felt confident and supported to deliver consistently positive experiences for children.
- Staff could continue to strengthen their understanding of the quality improvement framework to ensure a shared and consistent approach to self evaluation and improvement planning.
- Children benefited from engaging play zones, purposeful invitations to play, and stimulating indoor and outdoor environments that supported growing independence, curiosity and active learning.
- Increasing opportunities for literacy and further developing personalised learning through more responsive observations could support continued progress across all early level areas.
- Children experienced warm, trusting and highly responsive relationships with staff, leading to strong emotional security, calm transitions and high levels of wellbeing.
- Mealtimes, routines and personal planning were used very effectively to promote independence, ensure individual needs were met and strengthen meaningful partnerships with families.

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

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.

Leadership and management of staff and resources

Leaders demonstrated a strong and supportive commitment to a shared vision that aimed for the highest outcomes for children and families. This vision, developed as part of a whole-school approach, set out that every child should experience high-quality education and have opportunities to develop their individual strengths, helping them work towards a positive and successful future. One parent said, "Everyone is friendly and approachable. They communicate well on how my child has gotten on." Another commented, "There is timely information about progress reviews regarding my child." As a result, children were experiencing consistently positive and well-planned learning opportunities that supported their progress and wellbeing.

The setting's values of being safe, happy, respectful, achieving and persevering were clearly reflected in practice. Children were happy and content, and staff interactions were consistently warm, responsive and respectful, helping to nurture children's care, play and learning. As a result, children developed confidence, felt secure and were able to engage positively in their play and learning.

The head teacher and depute managers were visible within the centre and staff felt supported personally and professionally by the leadership team. This meant that leaders had created conditions where staff felt confident to initiate well informed change. As a result, staff were able to implement improvements with greater confidence, contributing to sustained positive experiences for children.

Priorities for improvement were realistic and were already helping to enhance children's experiences and outcomes. Key actions included strengthening quality assurance processes through robust and systematic monitoring activities that identified strengths and ongoing areas for development, while also addressing actions from the previous inspection. This included weekly sessions for all children that were supporting their emotional development and further extending early level listening and talking skills. In addition, the development of play zones, alongside enhanced planning and assessment processes, was helping to create richer, more engaging experiences that were beginning to reflect and build on children's interests. As a result, children benefited from experiences that were increasingly responsive, well structured and supportive of their ongoing development.

A quality assurance calendar supported ongoing development. Planned monitoring, focused data gathering and regular audits, including reviews of the environment, personal plans, medication procedures, and accident and incident processes, were increasingly understood by staff. As a result, standards across the setting became more consistent and supported children to experience safe, well organised and good quality care and learning. To further strengthen self evaluation processes, staff could become familiar with the quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sector so they can continue to build on this progress and ensure a shared understanding of expectations.

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.

Playing, learning and developing

Play zones had been thoughtfully introduced to support children's play and learning experiences. These helped improve the pace of the day and provided increased opportunities for children to lead their own learning. The introduction of invitations to play encouraged children to explore, investigate and, for some, engage in meaningful play, with scope for this work to continue developing through thought provoking setups. As a result, children experienced a more purposeful, engaging environment that supported growing independence and curiosity.

Children were offered opportunities to participate in numeracy experiences across the environment. Staff understood the importance of embedding numeracy within daily routines, and this was evident in practice. The audit processes for the setting, along with observations during the inspection, showed that there were more opportunities for numeracy than literacy, and that increasing literacy experiences could further strengthen children's learning and development. As a result, children were making steady progress in numeracy, with the potential for more balanced progress across all early level areas as literacy opportunities continue to develop.

Sensory experiences and schematic play supported the development of younger children well. These experiences were appropriate to children's stages of development and helped build early skills in exploration, coordination and understanding of the world. Creative experiences were available for younger children but could be further embedded to ensure they have daily opportunities to develop creativity. As a result, younger children benefited from experiences that supported their developmental progress, with scope to further enhance creative opportunities.

Staff knew children well and spoke confidently about their needs, interests and progress. Observations of children's learning were shared with families through an online platform, with many entries clearly linked to targets set by staff to support children's experiences and outcomes. One parent said, "My child enjoys the many different activities available during their time in nursery." Another commented, "There are different posts on their learning journal showing their daily activities, which reflects the children's developments." As a result, families remained well informed and children benefited from consistent support that strengthened their engagement, learning and overall progress.

Staff could benefit from achieving a stronger balance between planned learning intentions and capturing children's individual interests, helping to promote deeper engagement and sustained learning. As a result, children experienced learning that was appropriate and supportive, with clear potential for increased personalisation as staff continued to refine their observation and planning approaches.

The Microsoft SWAY digital platform was recently introduced and supported the overall planning of learning experiences within the playrooms. It was used as part of the test of change between planning for children's learning and the development of play zones. The platform helped staff focus on intended outcomes and responsive planning in a broad and general way.

Indoor and outdoor environments provided children with opportunities for play, exploration and development. Children moved freely between areas and were able to access a range of resources that supported physical, social and cognitive development. As a result, children benefited from varied and stimulating environments that promoted active learning.

Staff positioned themselves at children's level and supported play with warmth and sensitivity. Some practitioners used effective questioning techniques that helped extend children's thinking. There was further scope to develop the use of open-ended questions to promote higher-order thinking skills, and training had already been planned to support this. As a result, children experienced positive and consistent interactions that supported their learning, with the potential for deeper thinking as staff continue to build confidence in their questioning skills.

Children are supported to achieve 5 - Very Good

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.

Nurturing care and support

Staff were nurturing and caring, having established consistently positive and trusting relationships with children and their families. Interactions were warm, responsive and attuned to children's emotional needs, creating a strong sense of safety and belonging. One parent said, "My child is made to feel welcome and safe." Another noted, "Staff are lovely and very welcoming." As a result, children demonstrated high levels of emotional security and were confident in seeking comfort, guidance and support from familiar adults.

Transitions flowed naturally throughout the day, supporting continuity and helping children feel calm and secure. Children moved smoothly between routines and play experiences due to staff's sensitive and well coordinated approaches. Staff recognised individual cues and responded promptly and intuitively, ensuring that transitions were consistently relaxed, unhurried and supportive of children's individual needs. This meant that children remained settled and engaged, maintaining a strong sense of wellbeing throughout the day.

Staff showed a strong understanding of the systems, processes and approaches in place to safeguard children and promote their safety and wellbeing. They implemented procedures confidently and consistently, demonstrating a clear awareness of their roles and responsibilities in identifying and responding to concerns. This meant that children experienced a service where their safety and wellbeing were prioritised and protected through robust and effective practice.

Daily routines, including mealtimes, were used effectively to promote children's independence and learning. Staff and children sat together during meals, supporting positive supervision and the development of social skills, language and independence. Conversations were meaningful and inclusive, contributing to a calm and enjoyable eating experience. As a result, children developed confidence in self help skills and benefited from warm, social interactions during shared mealtimes.

Meals provided were nutritious and carefully adapted to meet allergies and individual preferences. Staff demonstrated strong awareness of dietary needs and ensured that meals were both safe and enjoyable for all children. Inclusive approaches ensured that every child took part in mealtimes confidently, with opportunities for siblings and friends to sit together. This meant that children experienced mealtimes that were safe, positive and tailored to their individual needs.

Children's wellbeing was supported through effective personal planning which clearly identified their interests, strengths and individual needs. Staff worked collaboratively with children, families and relevant professionals to sustain and promote wellbeing. Plans were regularly reviewed and updated to reflect children's changing circumstances. As a result, children received care and support that was personalised, well informed and responsive to their needs.

The use of wellbeing indicators provided a holistic overview of each child and supported informed planning of care and support. Where specific strategies were needed, staff implemented these consistently and with sensitivity, ensuring that children were well supported to thrive. As a result, children benefited from approaches that were tailored, coherent and aligned with their overall wellbeing.

The service promoted positive family relationships through daily handovers, family events and regular newsletters. Opportunities such as the PEEP Learning Together Programme and stay and play sessions enabled staff to build on family strengths, promote healthy lifestyles and enhance children's social skills and confidence. As a result, families felt connected to the setting, and children benefited from strong home-setting partnerships that enriched their learning and wellbeing.

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 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 and invitations (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 20 November 2024.

Action taken since then

The service strengthened opportunities for children to lead their play and learning through the development of play zones, invitations to play and more responsive staff interactions. Children experienced a better balance of planned and spontaneous learning, supported by thoughtful resources and improved staff practice.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

To support continuous improvement of the service, management should continue to develop their quality assurance processes, including monitoring and improvement planning. This should include, but is not limited to, monitoring of medication, accident/incident and risk management, infection control, play spaces and planning for children's learning.

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

'My environment is secure and safe' (HSCS 5.17) and 'I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes' (HSCS 4.19).

This area for improvement was made on 20 November 2024.

Action taken since then

Leadership strengthened quality assurance processes through a clear calendar of monitoring, including medication, accidents and incidents, risk management, infection control, play spaces and planning. Staff engaged consistently in these systems, contributing to improved oversight and increased consistency across the setting.

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
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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