

Ark Childcare Ltd

Day Care of Children

Woodside Steading
Mosstowie
Elgin
IV30 8UW

Telephone: 07539819058

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
11 February 2026

Service provided by:
Ark Childcare Ltd

Service provider number:
SP2004937981

Service no:
CS2004068093

About the service

Ark Childcare Ltd is a day care of children service. It is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 90 children, aged from birth to 14 years of whom no more than 75 children are aged 2-14 years and 15 children are under 2 years. The service is provided by Ark Childcare Ltd.

The service is located in a rural area near Elgin and operates from a large single storey building. Most playrooms have doors which open directly into the large garden area. This has been sectioned off to provide secure spaces for each age group. A large woodland area nearby is used by the service for further outdoor learning opportunities.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection, which took place on 10 February 2026 between 08:30 and 17:15 and 11 February 2026 between 08:00 and 13:00. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate. There was a maximum of 72 children present at the inspection.

To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included previous inspection findings, information submitted by the service, and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- received 28 questionnaires from families
- received 11 questionnaires from staff
- spoke with 6 parents
- spoke with leaders and staff
- assessed core assurances
- observed practice and daily experiences
- reviewed documents.

As part of our inspections, we assess core assurances. Core assurances are checks we make to ensure that 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, consistent, and responsive care that fostered their growth, development and wellbeing.
- Consistency in a child's care and routines such as mealtimes, nap times, and personal care provided children with a sense of safety and security.
- Children were able to be responsible and confident in their play as a result of quality play experiences being offered to them.
- Children made informed choices about their play and learning, having fun as they explored both inside and outside.
- Leaders should continue to ensure that children were able to benefit from a rich, multi-sensory environment, that maintained a positive impact on their learning and resilience.
- The service was striving to make the best use of spaces to help create a motivating environment for the children.
- Purposeful self-evaluation was being established, with the aim of providing high quality care and learning. Leaders should continue to ensure that momentum was sustained and that children and parents remained central to the process.

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 thrive and develop in quality spaces	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.

Leaders were at the early stages of a review of the vision and values and aims of the setting that reflected the aspirations of children and families. Ensuring that families and children remained involved in the process and future design would help them share responsibility and initiate well informed change. We suggested that a further consideration was the inclusion of the views of the wider community.

Purposeful self-evaluation was being established, with the aim of providing high quality care and learning. Parents were able to share their views during communications, open events, suggestions notelets and surveys. Children's views/ideas were being captured through floor books and planning. Leaders should continue to ensure that momentum was sustained and that children and parents remained central to the process.

Staff were gaining confidence in leading and sharing improvements, such as the arrangement of the play environment and the impact on children's experiences. They were being given opportunities to reflect together on a regular basis and they were beginning to use the reflections to bring about positive change.

Quality assurance and moderation of activities were in the process of being consistently embedded. Leaders should ensure that effective use was made of evidence to draw conclusions about the quality of the provision, and identify suitable approaches to improvement.

Leaders ensured that new staff were safely recruited, and that they understood their responsibilities within the team. An induction programme helped to ensure that staff were being well supported and confident in meeting the needs of the children.

There was a mix of experience across the staff team that had been recognised by leaders. Continued opportunities for the individual strengths of staff to be utilised to build consistent levels of skills would support team knowledge, and enhance outcomes for children.

Children thrive and develop in quality spaces 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.

The physical environment whether indoors or outdoors, was welcoming and equipped to meet the needs of the children that was secure and safe. It enabled children to make their own decisions and act independently, they moved around all areas of the setting with confidence.

The service was striving to make the best use of spaces to help create a motivating environment for the children. Carefully selected and well positioned furniture supported all children, including babies to freely play. Resources and materials were varied and catered to children's needs and interests. Leaders should continue to ensure that children were able to benefit from a rich, multi-sensory environment, that maintained a positive impact on their learning and resilience.

The importance of daily outdoor play and the benefits for enhancing learning and wellbeing were well recognised. Pre-school and school aged children were able to choose if they wanted to play indoors or outdoors. The youngest children also played outside on a daily basis. They went for a walk in the countryside where they enjoyed seeing and talking about a train, a tractor and birds. Pre-school children were being supported to develop their knowledge, respect, and understanding of their wider community, such as regular visits to the library, woodlands and a care home.

Staff promoted children's safety whilst considering a positive, balanced approach to risk in children's play. Children engaged in interesting play experiences that helped them to manage risk for themselves, extended their development and helped to build their resilience and self confidence. Children were able to explore when at the woods, they were confident in knowing the boundaries, enjoyed imaginary play with sticks and sledged down the hill. Overall, staff knew who was in their care, whether indoors or outdoors, and remained vigilant to risk. As a result, children were safe and their opportunities to enjoy fun play experiences were not compromised. We advised leaders to ensure that practice of keeping children accounted for indoors/ outdoors was consistently implemented across the setting.

Continued use of good practice guidance to review/refresh practice and risk assessment, would help ensure that the safety and wellbeing of children was maintained. We discussed this with the manager in relation to community visits. Ref: SIMOA (Safe, Inspect, Monitor, Observe, Act) and Bringing generations together - intergenerational practice - hub.careinspectorate.com

Staff had a clear understanding and confidence to provide and promote a clean and safe environment. We highlighted the benefits of robust monitoring and maintenance checks with leaders when an item was identified as needing some repair. Personal care arrangements were effectively planned for and supported infection prevention and control practice. Children's privacy and dignity were respected and there were appropriate changing facilities.

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 able to be responsible and confident in their play as a result of quality play experiences being offered to them. Staff provided meaningful interactions that extended, challenged and sustained children's learning. Overall, staff used effective modelling to support early social development, language and understanding. A young child was seeking help to wrap a baby doll in a blanket, staff encouraged them to gain independence by supporting them to do it for themselves.

Open ended questions were used to promote reasoning, curiosity, and expressive language. Staff introduced new concepts in play, for example, explaining the meaning of "compact" during sand play. Children were able to be responsible and confident in their play as a result of quality play experiences being offered to them. There was scope to strengthen these approaches across the staff team to support the extension of children's thinking and skills through problem solving.

Children made informed choices about their play and learning, having fun as they explored. The youngest children clearly enjoyed choosing and singing songs and engaged in stories with staff. Creative approaches appropriately enabled child led decision making and supported children's voices. A shared project on building a pirate ship provided rich opportunities for problem solving, negotiation and collaboration. There was collective pride captured when children asked to take a photo of their achievement. School age children

chose from creative play, board games, reading or outdoor using their imagination to create their own games. Staff should continue to remain mindful of the pace of the day for pre-school children, and the impact on play opportunities, particularly around the transition period before mealtimes and large group activities.

Planning documentation was beginning to show improved breadth and depth of learning across experiences. Staff were responsive to children's interests and carried out observations during play. Learning opportunities were being offered through a balance of intentional and responsive planning. Continued embedding and regular evaluation of observation practices would help secure consistency.

Children's individual learning folders contained observations with some next steps focussing on challenge and extension. Children were keen to show us their folders and spoke with confidence about their previous learning. This promoted creativity, ownership, and a sense of accomplishment in their work. In the pre-school rooms, children had free access to their folders. A consideration may be made for offering easier access to personal learning materials in other rooms.

The setting continued to embed positive relationships and partnership with families. They used a digital platform to share children's learning, achievements, and experiences in real time. Working with families to support their understanding of the benefits to children of play-based learning experiences, would also help to foster a collaborative approach of trust and cooperation.

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.

Practice was built on the understanding that nurturing relationships were essential for children's growth and development. As a result, children experienced warm, consistent, and responsive care that fostered their wellbeing. The importance of supportive transitions was recognised, and there was an understanding that their significance could vary for each child.

Children's food choices were nutritious, culturally appropriate, and safely prepared to account for any specific dietary needs, allergies, or intolerances. Fresh water was readily available throughout the day to help children remain hydrated. Overall daily routines, such as mealtimes were considered a valuable opportunity to promote children's involvement and independence. Children were able to collect and clear their own utensils and plates, poured their own drinks and served their own foods from the table. Mealtimes were also enhanced by the calm atmosphere and the close support of staff which was particular evident for babies and very young children. We suggested that leaders considered the seating arrangements within the dining room for pre-school children, to enable staff to provide support where it was needed and also to enhance their experiences.

There was consideration of creating diverse spaces that supported children to socialise, play in small groups, or alone, if they wished. This positively impacted on children's ability to regulate their emotions and build social skills.

Consistency in a child's care and routines such as mealtimes, nap times, and personal care provided children with a sense of safety and security. It was recognised that they provided rich opportunities to connect with the children and support their growth. When children were tired staff responded to their need for comfort, such as having cuddles and providing physical touch to calm and help them from waking to sleep. Where

children sought reassurance from staff, such as a hug, it was readily and warmly given. To support the safe management of medication we advised that the date of consent and clarity of review was recorded, for as required medication.

The manager and staff knew children and families well. They were striving to create a welcoming environment where children and families felt included, valued, and supported. There were systems in place to support communication with families both verbally and in writing. Parents shared that they felt fully involved in their child's care, they were always welcomed into the setting by friendly staff and their child had lots of fun experiences. Overall they were happy with the care and support their child received.

Children's wellbeing was supported through personal planning that was being tailored to individual needs and interests, and were regularly reviewed. To help ensure that support needs were identified, there was a proactive approach to working with children, families, and other professionals. Sharing information such as clear strategies of support with families, would also help to keep them at the heart of the decision making process. Leaders should ensure that staff had timely information and knowledge needed that enabled them to keep children nurtured and supported.

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 promote play which supports children across their developmental stages, the service should provide a stimulating range of resources which foster imaginative play, creative thinking, problem solving and learning.

This should include but is not limited to:

- a) Evaluating the variety and type of resources used with all ages of children.
- b) Ensuring that children have access to the resources and activities they choose.

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 5.19).

This area for improvement was made on 25 August 2023.

Action taken since then

A variety and different types of play resources were on offer that supported children of all ages to enjoy imaginary and creative play that supported their learning. All children were able to access resources and activities that enabled them to choose for themselves what they wanted to do.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

To promote child-led play and learning, the provider should ensure that a balance of responsive and intentional planning supports children's choice of activities and experiences.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) 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 25 August 2023.

Action taken since then

Responsive and intentional planning was being embedded by all staff so that children were able to engage in a range of play experiences that supported their choice of activities.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 3

To support improved outcomes for children, the provider should ensure that quality assurance processes are robust and transparent.

This should include, but is not limited to:

- a) Regular opportunities for staff to participate in meaningful and sustainable self-evaluative practice.
- b) Fostering an ethos of continuous improvement which promotes children's, staff's and parents' ownership of change.
- c) Monitoring methods of practice such as positive interactions and approaches to enabling child-led play and learning.

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 am confident that people are encouraged to be innovative in the way they support and care for me' (HSCS 4.25).

This area for improvement was made on 25 August 2023.

Action taken since then

An ethos of continuous improvement was being embedded, staff were able to participate and take ownership of self-evaluative practice. Children and families were being offered opportunities to share ownership of change and the setting continued to evaluate how this could be further improved.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 4

To ensure that children are kept safe, the provider should make sure that arrangements are in place to maintain a safe environment.

This includes but is not limited to:

- a) Regularly reviewing the indoors and outdoors environment for potential risks and taking action to address these.
- b) Ensuring effective infection prevention and control practices are implemented and audited.
- c) Ensuring that nappy changing facilities are enclosed to provide privacy and minimise the potential spread of infection.

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 5.19).

This area for improvement was made on 29 May 2024.

Action taken since then

The provider reviewed arrangements to address potential risks, that included effective infection prevention and control and suitable nappy changing facilities that helped to minimise the spread of infection.

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 thrive and develop in quality spaces	4 - Good
Children experience high quality spaces	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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