

Whithorn Nursery Day Care of Children

Whithorn Primary School
Whithorn
Newton Stewart
DG8 8PN

Telephone: 01988 500 291

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
19 February 2026

Service provided by:
Dumfries & Galloway Council

Service provider number:
SP2003003501

Service no:
CS2003015545

About the service

Whithorn Nursery is part of Whithorn Primary School, located in the village of Whithorn in Dumfries and Galloway. The service is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 50 children at any one time aged from two years to not yet attending primary school of whom no more than 10 may be under three years.

Children have access to one large playroom, and a smaller room for quiet and specialised activities. The playroom has direct access to a large outdoor play area.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 17 and 18 February 2026. Feedback was given via Teams video call on 19 February 2026. The inspection was carried out by one inspector from the Care Inspectorate. During our inspection there were 14 children in attendance on 17 February 2026 and 11 on 18 February 2026.

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
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- assessed core assurances, including the physical environment
- reviewed documents
- reviewed six responses from families who used or had used the service.

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 in relation to core assurances.

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

- Staff interactions were warm, caring, and highly valued by parents, who praised the approachable nature of staff and the supportive, nurturing relationships they provide for children.
- The team would benefit from further professional learning in child development and behaviour guidance to ensure responses to children are consistently sensitive, developmentally informed, and rights based.
- Leadership was generally visible and organised, with effective quality assurance processes in place.
- Children were happy, confident and engaged.
- Children benefitted from a well planned indoor and outdoor environment that supported independence, sustained play, and rich learning across language, creativity, digital skills and physical development.

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

Quality indicator: Leadership and management of staff and resources

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 within the service had been developed through a flexible and visible approach. The manager adopted a pattern of being floor based each morning, which supported day to day oversight of practice, and office based in the afternoons. This contributed to effective monitoring of children's experiences and increased accessibility for staff. However, staff views indicated that additional leadership presence and support at team level would have been beneficial. Some staff told us they felt the manager did not always recognise when they were finding aspects of their work challenging, which at times affected their wellbeing. These views reflected the need for continued development of relational leadership, improved awareness of staff wellbeing, and clearer communication pathways across the team.

There was a keyworker system in place which contributed to continuity of care for children and families. Staff knew children well, and children were observed to be relaxed and comfortable with all staff members. Safeguarding arrangements were robust, and safeguarding leads were clearly identified through photographs displayed in the foyer. This increased transparency and made it easier for families to seek support or raise concerns.

Parents received an informative handbook which communicated the service's vision, values and aims, along with information about the complaints procedure and signposting to the Care Inspectorate. A closed social media page and digital communication app were used effectively to maintain ongoing communication with families, helping to sustain trusting relationships.

The vision, values and aims had been reviewed at the beginning of the new term in August. These were displayed in the foyer, and feedback from families and staff had been gathered through digital forms to ensure the statements reflected the aspirations of the whole community.

The manager had created a comprehensive quality assurance calendar for 2025/26, aligned with the updated Quality Improvement Framework. This demonstrated an organised approach to self evaluation and continuous improvement. The calendar detailed routine audits of "All About Me" forms, personal plans, motor skills assessments and observations of children's wellbeing and involvement. As a result, quality assurance activity was more consistent, and the service had a clearer understanding of strengths and areas requiring attention.

Fortnightly meetings took place between the head teacher, nursery manager and school leadership staff. While these meetings supported discussion and oversight, the nursery manager would benefit from more strategic support from the school leadership team.

Peer learning observations had been undertaken and recorded, with clear areas for development identified where appropriate. Staff reported confidence in this process. Interaction audits included prompts to guide reflective practice and promote more intentional staff responses to children.

The improvement plan had been well constructed, clearly setting out priorities and articulating a sound rationale informed by recognised theoretical frameworks. Key tasks and desired outcomes were explained in a way that supported staff understanding and ownership of improvement work.

Although no new staff had recently joined the team, the manager demonstrated that the national induction resource was ready to be implemented should new employees commence. This ensured the service was prepared to support consistent induction and early professional learning for future staff.

Children play and learn 4 - Good

Quality indicator: Playing, learning and developing

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 very happy, confident and relaxed as they moved freely between the playrooms and the outdoor environment. They demonstrated a strong sense of belonging and security, which enabled them to make independent choices and lead their own play. The free flow approach supported children to follow their interests and deepen learning.

The large playroom was well organised with a wide variety of resources and provocations that stimulated children's curiosity. Children engaged meaningfully with materials which sustained their interest. This demonstrated that the learning environment had been thoughtfully planned to support exploration and creativity. Some group routines required review to ensure children's choices and engagement remained the priority. Continued improvement in recording individual next steps and maintaining fully child centred routines would further enhance learning experiences.

Children benefited from warm, responsive interactions from staff. During story time, children gathered comfortably on small sofas while a staff member read a familiar book. Clear, intentional language supported children to recognise and repeat words and pictures, promoting language development and confidence.

In role play, staff sensitively extended children's imaginative experiences within the "spa" area. Children enjoyed sensory play such as soapy foot baths, gentle music and simple relaxation materials. This nurtured wellbeing, creativity and early self care skills.

Staff supported digital learning effectively. Children confidently explored topics of interest on the smart board, such as identifying birds and looking at the changing shapes of the moon. This extended their understanding of the natural world and offered opportunities to explore concepts such as time and routines. When unsuitable online content briefly appeared, appropriate safeguarding actions were identified and agreed to strengthen digital safety.

Children experienced rich outdoor learning in a large, varied play space that promoted physical development, creativity and risk taking. Different surfaces, sheltered spaces and open areas enabled a wide range of play in all weathers. Gardening opportunities supported children's learning about sustainability as they planted vegetables, flowers and fruit trees as part of an ongoing orchard project.

Children accessed sensory experiences such as sand, water and ice, and they made marks on the ground with chalk. They cycled confidently, navigated obstacles and had ample space to run freely. Staff encouraged children to choose outdoor play whenever they wished, supporting them to dress appropriately for the weather. The genuine free flow approach promoted independence and ongoing learning.

Children are supported to achieve 4 - Good

Quality indicator: Nurturing care and support

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.

Staff interactions were warm and caring. Parents who provided feedback were overall very positive about the relationships they and their children had with staff. Some of their comments included "Staff are very approachable if I ever have any issues or any questions I need answered" and "The staff make sure my child has everything they need to get the most out of the time spent in the setting. They are listened to and given a space to say how they are feeling and if they need to say something."

We were made aware of instances when practice was not always consistent with the service's nurturing and rights based policies. On occasion, responses to children's behaviour did not fully reflect an understanding of early child development or the principles of supportive behaviour guidance. The team would benefit from additional professional learning in areas such as child development, emotional regulation and the underlying causes of behaviour. Strengthening knowledge in these areas will enable staff to respond more consistently and appropriately, ensuring children experienced sensitive and supportive care during difficult moments. (See Area for improvement below.)

Staff recognised when children needed additional reassurance and responded with sensitivity. This supported children to settle well, manage transitions and feel understood. For children who found regulation more difficult, staff offered comfort and guidance. This helped children begin to feel calmer and more secure, promoting positive emotional development.

Where children required additional support, staff sought advice from external agencies to help them better understand the child's needs. This early intervention contributed to children feeling more settled and supported in their learning.

Personal plans captured children's needs and were updated regularly. This meant staff had access to relevant information to help tailor care and support. However, limited parental involvement in reviews reduced opportunities for deeper collaboration, which could have strengthened relationships and ensured a more holistic picture of each child. In isolated cases, written language within plans did not fully reflect a nurturing, strengths' based approach, which had the potential to affect how supported families felt.

Most interactions during daily routines, including meals and personal care, were warm and encouraging. Children benefitted from staff sitting alongside them, engaging in conversations that built confidence and supported language development. However, some inconsistencies in supervision during lunch reduced the predictability and calm environment that children need to feel fully secure during busy routines.

Families were kept informed about the service through a closed and active social media page, termly newsletters, and regular updates. The nursery also participated in "Grow, Cook, Eat," a sustainability based programme where small groups of parents engaged in cooking sessions. Additionally, parents have the opportunity to be involved in the service through stay and play and book bug sessions.

We noted however that parents and carers had limited opportunities to enter the playroom, which reduced the natural, informal contact needed to build strong, trusting relationships with staff. One parent who provided feedback told us "My child struggles with transition at morning drop off and staff aren't very helpful in settling my child". Children would benefit from parents being welcomed into the playroom. This would support smoother transitions and increased emotional security.

Areas for improvement

1. To further enhance children's experiences, the provider should support all staff to access training that strengthens their knowledge, skills and confidence in responding to children's behaviour in a nurturing and developmentally informed way.

This is to ensure care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards, which state:

"I am supported to communicate in a way that is right for me." (HSCS 2.3)

"I am enabled to resolve conflict and build positive relationships with other people in my life." (HSCS 2.92)

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

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