

Little Hawthorn Loanhead Day Care of Children

16 Hawthorn Gardens
Loanhead
EH20 9EG

Telephone: 01314 403 057

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
9 March 2026

Service provided by:
Natalie Hollerin

Service provider number:
SP2005007217

Service no:
CS2005088311

About the service

Little Hawthorn Loanhead is an early learning and childcare centre registered to provide care to a maximum of 36 children aged birth to five years of age. The service is in Midlothian and has access to local amenities such as transport, shops and community services.

Children are cared for in playrooms on the ground floor of the detached building and a sleep room is situated upstairs. There is a large, enclosed garden to the rear of the building, with a separate area for the younger children. There are toilets, nappy changing facilities, kitchen and an office. The service has a partnership agreement with Midlothian Council to provide funded early learning and childcare.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Tuesday 3 March 2026 between 09:15 and 17:00 and Wednesday 4 March 2026 between 10:00 and 14:30. The inspection was carried out by one inspector from the Care Inspectorate.

A team manager was also present as part of the Care Inspectorate's quality assurance processes.

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:

- reviewed online questionnaires from three families and one staff member
- spoke with the management and staff
- spent time with children using the service
- spoke with three families on the day of inspection
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

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.

During 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.

Key messages

- Reflective practice that involved staff, children and families effectively shaped the service.
- A wide range of meaningful experiences meant that children experienced high levels of engagement, independence, creativity and sustained curiosity.
- Nurturing relationships, consistent routines, responsive care and effective personal planning promoted wellbeing and progression.
- Some aspects of the indoor environment were tired and needed refreshed.
- Consistent communication supported families to feel well informed, involved and confident in the management and staff team.
- Previous areas for improvement have been met, demonstrating the service's strong capacity for reflection and continuous improvement.

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	5 - Very Good
Children thrive and develop in quality spaces	4 - Good
Children play and learn	5 - Very 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 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.

Quality indicator: Leadership and management of staff and resources.

A range of consultation methods were used consistently, and these were increasingly helping the team identify what was working well and what needed to improve. Little Hawthorn Loanhead had reviewed their vision values and aims after Covid, with a much more 'home from home' approach and this could be seen and felt during our inspection. They should now consider reviewing again to ensure the vision, values and aims aligns with the current staff, families and children, helping everyone to understand and be actively included in achieving the shared aims.

Management actively involved staff, children, and families well in shaping the service. Regular questionnaires, policy of the month consultations, children's committees and menu planning discussions ensured everyone had a voice. Staff described feeling listened to and confident to contribute ideas for improvement. One family told us, 'We are asked regularly for our feedback about the nursery'. Leadership responded to feedback constructively, creating action plans and communicating outcomes within evaluative Floorbooks where contributions from the whole team were visible. This demonstrated effective communication and transparent decision making, ensuring that improvements reflected the needs of the children.

Leadership within the service was strong, reflective and improvement focused, with effective systems in place to support staff development, evaluate practice and manage resources responsibly. Management lead the team in using a structured approach to self evaluation. As a result, the team demonstrated a clear commitment to continuous improvement and used a broad range of self evaluation tools to drive positive change. The shared responsibility supported collective leadership and a strong understanding of continuous improvement across the team.

Management and staff reflected on actions from previous inspections and feedback from the Local Authority. Regular audits, including literacy, numeracy and environmental, supported staff and management to identify what was working well and where enhancements were needed. The team included children's voices within the audits as well as observations of the use of areas before and after changes. This ensured that decisions about the environment and resources were meaningful, evidence based and linked to children's experiences.

The quality assurance calendar enabled the manager to monitor and complete required tasks effectively. After discussions with the manager, they identified additional tasks that would strengthen their moderation by having them included in the calendar. This included updated and detailed individualised routines for the babies and toddlers within their files. This will provide all staff with the information needed to meet the children's needs. This showed ongoing reflection and ability to adapt to ensure best practice is sought in all aspects of care.

Staff files, training records and induction materials demonstrated positive recruitment and induction experience. All staff, described feeling supported, included and guided by mentors, colleagues and management. They were actively involved in planning, recording and self improvement discussions, helping

them develop as confident practitioners. Documentation around 1:1 supports, peer assessments and training impact statements showed a proactive approach to staff development. This contributed to positive 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.

Quality Indicator: Children experience high quality spaces

The physical environment consistently promoted children's safety, comfort and wellbeing, offering a homely and welcoming feel. Staff should periodically assess for clutter or over resourcing to ensure the environment remains well kept, organised and purposeful.

Children benefited from a wide range of resources indoors and outdoors that enhanced their play and learning. These supported different stages of development and allowed children to engage in experiences that promoted progression across the curriculum. In most areas, resources were thoughtfully presented, accessible and inviting.

Significant improvements had been made to the outdoor spaces, enhancing both safety and the quality of play. The replacement of the decking created a stable, level surface, and the higher surrounding fence increased privacy and security. Staff reported that the changes had contributed to deeper engagement in play. Repairs to the stair area and the secure gate strengthened safety arrangements and fully addressed a previous area for improvement. (See Area for improvement 1 in the section 'What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection').

Risk assessments were in place and responsive to the children and environments. Staff monitored weather conditions and carried out risk-benefit assessments to ensure children could take part in measured risky play, supporting them to develop confidence, resilience and early risk management skills.

Toilets and nappy changing areas were clean, airy and uncluttered. Personal protection equipment (PPE) and cleaning materials were safely stored and children's belongings were kept in sealed, labelled containers. While infection prevention practices were visible, some aspects of the environment were tired and needed a refresh. For example, stained rugs and chipped wall paint.

Children were meaningfully involved in shaping their environment. Their views were captured through Floorbooks, the children's committee and audits of areas such as the home corner and sand tray. Some areas felt busy; so staff should consider this when planning to support creativity and movement. The role play room was well organised, enabling meaningful, developmentally appropriate play.

Children's information was stored securely. While displaying allergy and support needs supported staff awareness, consideration should be given to the placement of this information to maintain privacy and dignity.

Children play and learn 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.

Quality indicator: Playing, learning and developing.

Children across all age groups demonstrated high levels of engagement, sustained interest in a broad range of meaningful play and learning experiences. Younger children actively explored sensory opportunities, such as painting with cars, water play and playdough. They remained deeply involved as staff modelled play and sustained early curiosity, supporting them to develop early language, thinking and problem solving skills.

Older children engaged purposefully and confidently as they moved between areas. They showed concentration and creativity in role play, construction, risky play, puzzles, water play, mark making and storytelling. Their play choices reflected a strong sense of ownership, with children returning to experiences, negotiating roles and contributing ideas. This indicated secure relationships and a strong sense of belonging.

Children displayed growing independence, confidently accessing resources, pouring drinks, setting tables and choosing where and how to play. These routines strengthened children's autonomy and supported them to develop early life skills. A calm, relaxed atmosphere further promoted emotional security, allowing children to settle quickly and engage in sustained learning.

Across all rooms, children had access to experiences that promoted early literacy and numeracy. Staff provided opportunities to explore patterns, puzzles, cubes, dot cards, digital scales, water and sand play. Children engaged in drawing and mark making using varied materials, supporting early writing skills. Songs and stories were naturally woven into play, deepening children's communication and language development.

Children accessed outdoor spaces throughout the day, which supported physical development and wellbeing. Due to the room layout, babies and toddlers did not have direct access outdoors. Staff mitigated this by offering to take children outside when requested, ensuring access to fresh air and active play was available. Families consistently praised the quality of experiences available to their children. They told us, 'My child is given the choice to do different activities, the staff are great at picking up on the kids' interests, they have been to the library and trips to the duck pond too' and 'The wet suit is always ready for the washing, a clear sign to me that they are having a great time.' This feedback reflects families' strong confidence in the richness and responsiveness of the learning experiences provided.

Staff interactions were consistently warm, responsive, and attuned, supporting children to feel safe, valued, and confident. Staff used effective questioning, prompts, descriptive commentary and vocabulary modelling to extend play and deepen thinking. Children sought comfort and connection easily, showing secure attachments.

Planning approaches were strongly child centred, with staff using observations, play cues and discussions to shape learning. Floorbooks and planning folders evidenced responsive approaches, with staff extending learning where interest remained high and adapting when engagement reduced. Next steps were updated monthly and linked to developmental pathways, ensuring children progressed at a pace that was right for them.

Families consistently told us that staff communicate effectively about children's learning, which helped them feel well informed and meaningfully involved. They described how learning journals provide regular,

high quality updates with photographs, and noted that planned parents' nights further strengthen their engagement in their child's progress.

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.

Quality indicator: Nurturing care and support.

Children experienced warm, nurturing and trusting relationships across all rooms. Staff were consistently calm and patient, which supported children to feel secure and confident in their environment. Children received close physical comfort, cuddles and reassurance, promoting strong, secure attachments. Staff responded promptly and sensitively to children's cues. These attuned interactions ensured children felt understood and protected.

Children's wellbeing was promoted effectively through predictable routines, sensitive care practices and opportunities for rest. Staff enabled children to manage risks safely, for example during pallet climbing, while still maintaining appropriate challenge and independence. Conversations during mealtimes reinforced healthy choices, and staff offered warm, meaningful praise that supported children's self esteem and confidence.

Staff consistently upheld children's dignity and autonomy. They explained caregiving actions in a respectful manner, asking, 'May I wipe your nose?' or 'Shall we go and change your nappy now?' This helped children feel valued and included in their own care. Toilets and nappy changing areas were bright, well maintained and hygienic, supporting positive routines. Mealtimes were calm and homely, and children were encouraged to develop their independence, such as children helping to set tables.

Transitions were well planned and thoughtfully supported. Children spent time in their new rooms in advance, enabling them to build familiarity and confidence. Families were consulted about preferences and any concerns, ensuring transitions were personalised and sensitive. New staff were introduced gradually to children and families, helping build early trust and security.

Personal plans were established and effective and staff still knew each child well. Additional approaches were used effectively to support identified needs and targets were shared with families. Wellbeing indicators were reviewed monthly and chronologies were used meaningfully to monitor changes and ensure timely, coordinated support was identified and implemented. Monthly reviews of allergy and medication information meant medical needs were managed robustly. Each room held clear, accessible guidance to support all staff, including agency workers of these care and support needs. The manager had identified an area for improvement within the reviews of some information and had already begun actioning this.

Positive relationships with families were evident throughout the documentation and in our discussions with them. Families told us they felt well informed about their child's learning through the online journals, which supported their understanding and involvement. Several told us that they were able to speak to staff regularly, both formally and informally. Comments included, 'We are asked regularly for our feedback about the nursery' and 'The staff are all very friendly and give great updates when we pick up our child. There is always something new going on and my child learns so much each day. They love going to nursery and has bonded well with all staff'.

Transition records demonstrated effective collaboration with families, who praised staff for building children's confidence during periods of change. Children proudly shared family photo displays, reinforcing their sense of identity and belonging. Staff were highly attuned to children's cues and used their observations and conversations purposefully to shape practice. This reflected close, trusting relationships and strong communication with families, contributing to positive outcomes.

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

The provider should review maintenance and safety of the setting. This should include reviewing environmental monitoring procedures, making sure the decking areas are safe, reviewing outdoor resources and equipment, and risk assessments are kept up to date.

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

'I experience an environment that is well looked after with clean, tidy and well-maintained premises, furnishings and equipment" (HSCS 5.24)

This area for improvement was made on 26 February 2025.

Action taken since then

The decking had been replaced, making it level and sturdy. The fence surrounding the decking is now higher, and staff reported that this has added to the intimate feel of the area and they have observed children to be more engaged in their play with the higher fence. This also provided privacy and added safety. The gate at the top of the stairs provided a barrier to allow staff to monitor and ensure safety on the stairs. The top stairs had been fixed and were sturdy.

The team had risk assessed the decking area and monitored the weather to ensure it remained safe. Other measures included a maintenance list that staff and management used to monitor and prioritise areas for repair. Risk assessments were in place to ensure consideration and mitigations to risk are considered and shared with all staff.

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

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Children experience high quality spaces	4 - Good
Children play and learn	5 - Very Good
Playing, learning and developing	5 - Very Good
Children are supported to achieve	5 - Very Good
Nurturing care and support	5 - Very Good

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Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

enquiries@careinspectorate.com

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