

Lochardil Early Learning and Childcare Setting Day Care of Children

Lochardil Primary School
Lochardil Road
Inverness
IV2 4LB

Telephone: 01463 230 250

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
26 February 2026

Service provided by:
Highland Council

Service provider number:
SP2003001693

Service no:
CS2003017236

About the service

Lochardil Early Learning and Childcare Centre is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 80 children at any one time, aged from three years to those not yet attending primary school, of whom no more than 40 are of school age.

The service is operated over three classrooms within the primary school campus, and has direct access to an enclosed outside area. Additional designated outside areas are also accessible within the school playground.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 24 February between 9:20 and 17:40, and 25 February between 08:15 and 16:30. This 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.

To inform our evaluation we:

- spent time with children using the service, and spoke to five of their parents/carers
- received 26 completed questionnaires from staff and parents/carers
- spoke with staff and the management team
- assessed core assurances, including the physical environment
- observed practice and children's experiences
- 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 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 benefited as there was an ethos of continuous improvement, with opportunities for children and their families to become involved.
- Nursery children enjoyed a stimulating and challenging environment indoors and out. For school aged children the outdoor environment could be better used.
- Staff were observing children's engagement and learning, however, the information was not consistently being used to inform planning for children's progression.
- Children were relaxed confident and having fun in the nursery and out of school clubs.
- Staff knew children very well and had formed positive relationships, which enabled them to promote children's health and wellbeing.

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 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 5 - Very Good

Quality Indicator: Leadership and management of staff and resources

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.

The service's vision, values and aims (VVA) were clearly aligned with those of the wider school community. These were visible throughout the setting, including a child friendly version, helping children, families and staff understand what the service strives to achieve. Parents were routinely involved in reviewing the VVA through the parent council, which supported a shared sense of purpose across the community.

The VVA were well-embedded in practice, and reflected high aspirations for children and families. Staff and parents told us they felt confident expressing their views and contributing to change. This helped leaders understand what mattered most to families, and supported collaborative improvement.

Systems for self-evaluation and quality assurance were well-established, and informed by the views of children, families and other professionals. Most parents told us they felt meaningfully involved in shaping the service. One parent commented, "I feel I have lots of opportunity to share thoughts and opinions on the service," while another said, "Parents are regularly asked for feedback on how to help the children learn. What was effective, what we would like to see happen." A small number were unaware of opportunities, and leaders agreed to ensure information is consistently communicated.

Quality assurance processes were shared throughout the staff team, with a continuity of approach promoted through peer reviews and rotation of responsibilities. These approaches promoted consistency, professional reflection and improved outcomes for children.

The service demonstrated an appropriate pace of change, led by a confident and focused senior leadership team. Planned developments were based on previous guidance. However, staff were aware of the new quality improvement framework for early learning and childcare sectors, and had begun using it to evaluate practice. Leaders planned to use this new guidance to inform future improvement priorities.

Staff told us that strong teamwork was a strength of the service, and that they were well supported by senior management team. All staff were appropriately registered and understood their professional responsibilities

Leaders recognised the importance of a stable, skilled team and were committed to safe and careful recruitment, despite sector wide challenges. Children in the out of school provision contributed their views on the qualities they valued in practitioners, helping ensure recruitment remained child-centred.

Opportunities for mentoring and role modelling were well-established. Team meetings, working groups and dedicated time for reflection enabled staff to share ideas, build confidence and maintain a consistent approach. This contributed to high quality experiences and outcomes for children.

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 well-supported because staff understood their learning and development needs. Staff used a range of approaches to meet individual needs, which contributed to children being confident and successful in their play.

Nursery children experienced a variety of stimulating indoor and outdoor opportunities, that promoted learning across different areas. We identified scope to further strengthen experiences, by introducing more real life materials in the home corner, to better reflect children's cultures and home lives.

School aged children enjoyed their time in the setting, however, the level of challenge within activities was limited. Outdoor experiences, in particular, lacked sufficient variety and stimulation. Very few resources were available, and staff did not engage in children's play. This resulted in children's play lacking focus and reduced opportunities for sustained engagement. Extending the range and complexity of activities would better support this age group's interests and abilities.

Nursery planning was responsive and informed by children's interests. Staff extended children's ideas effectively, such as developing a planned story into role play and small world experiences. For school aged children, resources were set out in advance, based on previous preferences. Children told us they thought they could request alternatives, increasing independently accessible resources would enable them to follow their own interests more confidently.

Children had regular opportunities to develop early language, literacy and numeracy skills. They accessed books for both spontaneous and planned reading, contributed to environmental print, and engaged in mark making and discussion. Numeracy was supported through counting, identifying shapes and comparing measurements. Digital technology was used to enhance learning when linked to interests, such as torches, keyboards and cameras. A smart screen was used for mindfulness and yoga, although, at times it was used simply for watching programmes. We discussed the importance of ensuring digital experiences remain active, purposeful and engaging.

Families were actively involved in children's learning. There were opportunities for families to engage in activities, such as reading stories, sharing skills and attending events. These strengthened their understanding of play-based learning, and supported positive relationships between home and the setting.

Staff interactions were warm, respectful and facilitated children's learning, without taking over their play. Staff encouraged cooperation and problem solving through thoughtful questioning and responsive engagement. These interactions supported children to develop confidence, self regulation, empathy and creativity.

Staff used observations to plan for children's learning, though the quality and consistency varied. Some observations lacked dates or used differing formats, and learning goals were not always identified. Inconsistent use of observational information reduced the effectiveness of planning, with the potential to inhibit children's progress. The management team had identified this, and planned for the development of these processes and support for staff. For school aged children, involving them directly in setting goals would enhance ownership of their learning.

Children are supported to achieve 5 - Very Good

Quality Indicator: Nurturing care and support

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.

Staff and leadership understood the importance of nurturing relationships for children and families. This meant that children experienced warm, consistent and responsive care, which are essential for their wellbeing and development. Children were supported to express their needs, choices and emotions. Staff were responsive and flexible in this, depending on individual children's needs.

Children's wellbeing was supported through any transitions. This included those within the daily routine, such as lunch times. This meant transitions were well-managed to minimise disruption and potential upset for children. Transition into primary one started early in the academic year, and parents had fed back that they valued this. Children were allocated "buddies" in primary six, to guide and support them into primary one.

Consistent relationships were promoted, for example, having the same key worker for siblings. However, all staff were knowledgeable about individual children, their characters, preferences and support needs.

Children's privacy and dignity was respected. Staff balanced promoting independence with offering support when needed. There were opportunities for children to play in small groups, or alone if they preferred. This promoted choice, peer relationships and social skills.

Children's health was promoted, as food was nutritious and prepared safely, taking account of any allergies or dietary requirements. Fresh water was available throughout the day. There were opportunities for children to be involved in the planning and preparation of snack. This promoted their independence and awareness of healthy choices. Snack times were relaxed and social experiences, where staff were focused on children. This promoted children's safety, and provided opportunities to build and maintain relationships.

Children's wellbeing and confidence were supported through a consistent approach to who was caring for them throughout the day. Staff moved with the children to complete tasks, or support, rather than passing to a colleague if they moved into a different area. Consistent routines, such as mealtimes and together times provided children with a sense of security. Administration of medication was well-managed to support children's health.

Personal plans were in place to promote children's health and wellbeing. These were effectively used to identify children's needs. For nursery children, the plans contained details of how staff were supporting them. Staff caring for school aged children knew the children very well. However, this knowledge was not reflected in the children's plans. We discussed this during the inspection, and immediate action was taken to develop the plans.

Parents who provided feedback all agreed that they had good relationships with staff caring for their children. They commented that staff were "Fun, friendly and very helpful," and told us, "The staff are very friendly and always approachable. They always try to support family any way they can." These positive relationships increased parental engagement in the service, and promoted effective information sharing. This enabled staff to offer support when it was necessary, and promoted a continuity of care for children.

Staff knew children's families, and made time to talk to them at drop off and pick up time. There were events to promote parents understanding of learning through play, as well as opportunities to comment on their child's learning. For example, attending parents' evenings or commenting on their child's learning pathway.

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	5 - Very Good
Leadership and management of staff and resources	5 - Very 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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