

# Drongan Early Childhood Centre Day Care of Children

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**Type of inspection:**  
Unannounced

**Completed on:**  
4 March 2026

**Service provided by:**  
East Ayrshire Council

**Service provider number:**  
SP2003000142

**Service no:**  
CS2003016948

## About the service

Drongan Early Childhood Centre is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 74 children not yet attending primary school at any one time. No more than 74 are aged two years to those not yet attending primary school full time with no more than 10 aged two to under three. Forty-nine children attended the service during the inspection.

The service is provided by East Ayrshire Council and is located within the community of Drongan. Accommodation consists of two playrooms, a sensory/quiet room and a large enclosed outdoor play space.

## About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on the 3 and 4 March 2026. 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 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
- 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 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

- Children experienced high quality, engaging play and learning, with staff skilfully extending children's curiosity and supporting strong progress.
- Relationships were warm, nurturing and highly responsive, helping children feel safe, valued and emotionally secure.
- Staff demonstrated a deep understanding of children's needs, delivering personalised support that enabled all children to thrive.
- Leadership was strong, reflective and values led, creating a positive ethos where staff felt supported and committed to continuous improvement.
- Families were meaningfully involved in the life of the service, benefiting from strong communication, inclusive practice and genuine partnership working.

## 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	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

### 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 vision, values and aims of the service were clearly reflected in the positive ethos that existed across the centre. The management team and staff were collaboratively reviewing the vision, values and aims, and they demonstrated a strong, shared commitment to delivering high quality experiences for children. The management team promoted a reflective culture, where staff, families and children were given a voice. This created an environment where staff felt respected, listened to and confident to engage in continuous improvement. The service was very community orientated, and this was evident in the warm relationships with families and the high level of parental involvement. Families demonstrated strong support for the setting, including through donations that enriched the learning environment and contributed to improved outcomes for children.

Children's achievements were celebrated meaningfully, including through the Proud Cloud, which showcased progress and reinforced a culture where children's successes were valued. Children were respected as individuals and supported at their own pace. Their voices were clearly embedded in planning, play experiences and daily decision-making. This contributed to children feeling confident, included and central to the life of the nursery.

Staff spoke highly of one another and of the leadership team. They consistently described feeling well-supported, both emotionally and professionally. This was reflected in the strong teamwork we observed, the positive atmosphere across playrooms and the confidence with which staff delivered high quality experiences for children. The team demonstrated considerable skill in meeting a wide range of needs, including several children who required high levels of support. Staff effectively managed complex needs, ensuring children remained safe, nurtured and included. While this high intensity work was managed very well, it was recognised that sustaining this level of pressure over long periods placed considerable demand on the team. Leaders were aware of this and were working collaboratively to ensure staff wellbeing was prioritised.

Staffing levels had impacted service delivery at points, leading to reduced operational hours for the service. Parents expressed understandable concern about the impact this had on routines and planning; however, they also recognised the extraordinary efforts of staff to minimise disruption and maintain high standards. The management team was proactive in addressing staffing issues, including extending contract lengths and advertising supply posts. Forward planning had started to prepare for future staff changes. This ensured there were plans for continuity and support for children.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were strong features of practice. Monthly monitoring folders, a well-structured quality assurance calendar and regular audits demonstrated a rigorous and well-embedded approach. The quality of children's learning journals and personal plans reflected the effectiveness of these systems. Staff benefited from regular support, mentoring and coaching, including a robust induction programme aligned with national guidance. This ensured new staff were confident, consistent and well-integrated into the team.

Overall, staff demonstrated a reflective, nurturing and aspirational culture that supported high quality outcomes for children and families. The strong ethos, effective systems and committed staff team ensured positive outcomes for children.

## Children play and learn 5 - Very Good

### Quality indicator: Playing, learning and developing

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.

Children experienced a rich and engaging learning environment where they were highly motivated, confident and enthusiastic in their play. Play experiences were well planned, developmentally appropriate and responsive to children's interests. Children were highly engaged in the play environment.

Staff had a deep understanding of how children develop and learn, and they used this effectively to tailor experiences that met the needs of all children. They were skilled at observing play, recognising learning potential and extending children's thinking through high quality interactions. Staff knew children extremely well as individuals and used this knowledge to create meaningful, personalised learning opportunities. This was especially evident for children who needed extra support and who made clear progress as a result of consistent, nurturing and well-judged support.

Children engaged confidently with both indoor and outdoor environments. Outdoors, children demonstrated independence, curiosity and strong self-help skills, reflecting the ongoing work staff had undertaken to promote autonomy in daily routines. The large outdoor space enabled children to develop gross motor skills, problem solve and follow their interests in a natural and stimulating environment. Children were visibly happy, settled and eager to participate in the experiences on offer.

Across playrooms, learning was purposeful and embedded within play. For the 2-3 age group, staff planned experiences that focused on cooperation, sharing and relationship building. Activities such as playdough, lotto games and group sensory exploration supported children to develop turn taking, communication and social interaction. A wide range of sensory experiences including sand, gloop, lentils, water play and outdoor texture-based activities enhanced exploration and supported children at an appropriate developmental level.

For children aged 3-5, staff created varied provocations that encouraged sustained engagement and deeper learning. Experiences such as magnetic colour matching games supported early mathematics, problem solving, fine motor development and language acquisition. Staff demonstrated strong skills in extending learning in the moment, for example following children's natural curiosity when they discovered a small spider outdoors, skilfully broadening the experience into scientific enquiry and close observation learning.

The quality of interactions was a clear strength. Staff used approaches informed by communication and language training, including visuals, signing and prompts to support communication and emotional regulation. This had a positive impact on outcomes for children, particularly for children requiring extra help with communication, who were seen thriving in an environment that celebrated their strengths and reduced barriers to engagement.

Spaces such as The Nest were thoughtfully designed to support regulation, engagement and inclusion. Children accessed these areas confidently, using them as secure bases from which to explore their learning.

Planning and assessment processes were well-established and responsive. Staff ensured that children's voices and interests shaped the learning environment. Area books captured children's ideas, which directly informed the planning cycle. Personal plans and learning journals contained clear, meaningful targets and tracking systems were easy for staff and families to understand.

Overall, children experienced high quality play and learning that supported their progress well. Staff's skills, sensitivity and responsiveness created an environment where children were engaged, achieving and thriving.

## 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.

Children experienced warm, consistent and highly attuned nurturing care from staff who knew them extremely well. Across both playrooms, staff demonstrated sensitive, responsive practice that promoted children's emotional security, wellbeing and confidence. Nurturing interactions were a clear strength. Staff offered cuddles, reassurance and comfort whenever children required it, responding quickly and thoughtfully to both verbal and non-verbal cues. These interactions demonstrated a deep knowledge of children's individual needs and helped children feel safe, settled and understood.

Secure relationships were evident throughout the setting. Very young children confidently approached staff for help, reassurance or to share achievements, reflecting strong attachments and trust. Staff positioned themselves at children's level, used eye contact effectively, and listened attentively, ensuring children felt valued and able to express themselves. Staff communicated well with each other, sharing key information promptly so transitions between adults were smooth and supported continuity of care.

Personal care was delivered respectfully and in a way that protected children's dignity. Staff asked children for permission before nappy changes and used visual cues to help children understand routines. When a child was deeply engaged in play, staff sensitively delayed the care task until they were finished, demonstrating respect for children's choices and autonomy. Consistent staffing and predictable routines further strengthened children's sense of security.

Mealtimes were calm, nurturing and unhurried. Staff promoted independence through self-serving opportunities and used signing, visuals and clear language to support children's communication and understanding. Children were given choices which encouraged decision-making and built confidence. Lunchtime interactions were warm, engaging and child-centred. Staff demonstrated a strong knowledge of individual children, responding sensitively when a child briefly left and later returned to the table.

Transitions were well-managed and supported children's emotional needs. Staff used simple songs, visual prompts and consistent routines to create smooth and predictable transitions between activities and environments. This supported children to manage change throughout the day.

Personal plans were detailed, regularly reviewed and contained all relevant information to support children's individual needs. These linked clearly with learning journals, planned supports, healthcare plans and external agency input, ensuring a coherent and responsive approach. Partnerships with families were strong and built on mutual trust and open communication. Learning journals were used effectively to share children's progress. Staff maintained regular verbal communication at pick up, sharing care information and highlights of children's experiences. Parents described staff as kind, welcoming, professional and approachable, and many noted the strong attachments their children had developed, especially with key workers.

Family engagement was embedded throughout the setting. Parents participated in stay and play sessions, contributed to fundraising and were welcomed daily by staff and management who maintained a highly visible presence at the entrance at drop off and collection times. The family support worker offered personalised support to families, strengthening relationships and improving outcomes for children.

## 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 ensure children consistently receive high quality play and learning experiences, the provider and management team should, at a minimum:

- a) ensure that all registered play spaces are accessible to children throughout their session
- b) ensure play areas are sufficiently resourced with high-quality materials to ensure children are provided with sufficient opportunities to engage meaningfully with their play environment
- c) review the arrangements for large group planned activities to ensure this meets the needs of children
- d) continue with their plans to further develop the outdoor play space available to children attending the 2-3 playroom
- e) monitor the quality of children's play and learning environments and how the routines of the day impact or support children's needs to be met
- f) monitor the quality of children's personal plans and learning journals to ensure planned play and learning experiences are provided in response to children's individualised targets and next steps.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: "As a child, my social and physical skills, confidence, self-esteem and creativity are developed through a balance of organised and freely chosen extended play, including using open-ended and natural materials" (HSCS 1.31).

This area for improvement was made on 20 September 2023.

## Action taken since then

All planned actions had been fully embedded into practice, and clear evidence shows that the changes have improved children's experiences, reduced pressure on transitions, and strengthened the overall quality of daily provision.

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](http://www.careinspectorate.com)

Detailed evaluations

<b>Leadership</b>	<b>5 - Very Good</b>
Leadership and management of staff and resources	5 - Very Good
<b>Children play and learn</b>	<b>5 - Very Good</b>
Playing, learning and developing	5 - Very Good
<b>Children are supported to achieve</b>	<b>5 - Very Good</b>
Nurturing care and support	5 - Very Good

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