

Links Nursery Balmedie Day Care of Children

Unit 4
Birch Way
Balmedie
Aberdeen
AB23 8SJ

Telephone: 01358 743 094

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
6 March 2026

Service provided by:
Links Nurseries Ltd

Service provider number:
SP2007009491

Service no:
CS2007167228

About the service

Links Nursery Balmedie is a daycare of children service. It is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 93 children not yet attending primary school at any one time. No more than 17 are aged under 2 years based in the Starfish room; no more than 18 children aged 18 months to 2 years 9 months based in the Turtle room; no more than 25 aged from 2 years 6 months to not yet attending primary school full time based in the Tigersharks room and no more than 33 children aged 3 years to not yet attending primary school full time based in the Puffin room.

The service is located in the coastal town of Balmedie, close to local amenities such as shops and parks. Care is provided across four rooms situated on two floors. Children have access to three secure outdoor areas. The service operates 07:30 to 18:00, Monday to Friday.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 4 March 2026 between 13:00 and 18:05, 5 March 2026 between 08:40 and 18:30 and 6 March 2026 between 08:30 and 17:10. 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 six of their parents/carers
- received 41 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

- Quality assurance processes were well organised and supported staff to maintain positive practice.
- Most children experienced positive, nurturing interactions that supported their engagement and learning.
- Inconsistencies in the quality of play environments and staff observations impacted how effectively children's progression was planned for.
- Staff knew children well and had formed positive relationships with families.
- Children experienced nurturing, responsive relationships that supported their 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	4 - Good
Children play and learn	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
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.

The service's vision, values, and aims (VVA) were shared with families through handbooks and displays. This supported parents and carers to understand what they could expect from the service and contributed to a culture where they felt confident suggesting improvements. Children had contributed to the design of the VVA illustration, helping promote a sense of ownership. Plans were in place to review the VVA with families and further consider how children's rights could be reflected.

Parents were offered several opportunities to provide feedback, including "parent pod" meetings, surveys and informal discussions. Almost all parents told us they felt meaningfully involved in shaping the service. Some shared examples of being asked for their views and attending stay and play sessions. We discussed the importance of ensuring parents consistently receive feedback about how their contributions and suggestions influence change. Children's views were captured in some ways, such as through mind maps. The team recognised the need to broaden their approaches for gathering children's perspectives to ensure their voices meaningfully inform improvements.

Quality assurance systems were well organised and supported staff to maintain positive practice. The management team acknowledged that increasing delegated responsibilities would help sustain these processes, and plans were underway to implement this. Staff told us they valued being involved in evaluating and improving the service. Action plans were in place where improvements had been identified; however, in some areas progress had been slower than intended, such as embedding observation and planning approaches for children's learning. We discussed how regular monitoring and review could support a more consistent pace of change. Use of the new quality framework will further strengthen self-evaluation and improvement practice.

Children's safety was promoted through safe recruitment procedures. All staff were appropriately registered with professional bodies and were confident about maintaining their registration. Staff spoke positively about training they had attended and how this had improved their practice.

Senior managers recognised the importance of maintaining a stable staff team to support children's wellbeing and attachments. Recent higher-than-usual staff turnover had prompted reflection on strategies to strengthen retention, including recruiting staff whose skills aligned with the existing team.

A structured induction programme was in place, and staff told us this helped build their confidence and understanding of their roles. Mentoring arrangements supported staff who were new to specific roles. This contributed to children experiencing consistent and nurturing care from confident staff.

Children play and learn 3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

Quality Indicator: Playing, learning and developing

We evaluated this quality indicator as satisfactory/adequate where strengths just outweighed the weaknesses.

Children were supported by staff who had a clear understanding of how they learn and develop. This was reflected in positive staff interactions and appropriate expectations of children. Most children were engaged and having fun during a range of indoor and outdoor activities. However, at times particularly during transitions such as preparing to go outdoors, children were not fully engaged. We discussed with the manager how improved communication between staff during these periods could further enhance children's experiences.

While children accessed a variety of resources, the quality and presentation of some materials did not always promote sustained engagement. For example, a mark making area lacked inviting materials and some resources in another room required attention. Staff should review play spaces and develop more effective provocations to support children's engagement and extend their learning. (See area for improvement 2.)

Staff planned experiences that supported children to learn while also responding to their interests in the moment. Most children were suitably challenged and able to make choices independently, promoting purposeful learning. However, a small number of children would benefit from further challenge to maintain their engagement and support their progression.

Children had opportunities to develop their skills in literacy, language and numeracy. This included discussions with staff, the use of Makaton, access to books and storytelling, and singing. Children were encouraged to count, compare, and identify colours and shapes. Digital technology supported their learning through tools such as speech buttons and tablets for exploring interests.

Staff were sensitive to children's play cues and enabled them to learn at their own pace. Positive relationships were evident, with staff supporting children to interact kindly, listen to each other and take turns. Interactions were nurturing and warm, with babies receiving comfort and older children being praised for their achievements. While some staff effectively extended children's play, there were missed opportunities to build on children's learning. For example, water play could have been used to explore early concepts of measurement and capacity. Some senior staff were confident in modelling high quality interactions, but others required further development.

Staff recorded observations of children's play and learning and shared these with parents/carers, helping them understand their child's experiences and progress. However, the regularity of observations varied across the team. Quality assurance processes had identified this inconsistency, and plans were in place to support improvement. Observations described children's experiences and identified learning; however, they did not consistently identify next steps. As a result, children's progression was not always clearly planned for, which may limit opportunities for them to build on their learning. (See area for improvement 1.)

Areas for improvement

1. The manager and provider should work to embed systems, across the full staff team, for planning and assessment which consistently promote children's progression.

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

'I am supported to achieve my potential in education and employment if this is right for me' (HSCS 1.27).

2. The manager and provider should ensure that children have access to an environment and resources which maximise opportunities for them to be challenged, creative and engaged in their play.

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 have fun as I develop my skills in understanding, thinking, investigation and problem solving including through imaginative play and storytelling' (HSCS 1.30).

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.

Children experienced nurturing and responsive relationships that supported their overall wellbeing. Staff and management recognised the importance of strong attachments, and recent staff turnover had been managed effectively to minimise disruption. Parents told us that relationships between staff and children were a key strength of the service. They described staff as nurturing, knowledgeable about their children, and creating opportunities for children to feel confident and secure.

Children demonstrated confidence and a sense of safety within the setting. They were encouraged to express their needs, and staff responded promptly when a child required reassurance or comfort. Staff interactions were warm and attuned, with adults consistently getting down to children's level and checking in with them throughout the day.

Transitions into nursery and between playrooms were flexible and responsive to children's needs. Settling in visits and appropriate information sharing supported children to build relationships at their own pace. When children moved between rooms, decisions were based on developmental needs rather than solely on chronological age. However, some transitions within daily routines could have been smoother, and improved staff communication would support children to feel more secure during these times.

Children's privacy and dignity were respected. Staff offered discreet support with care routines and encouraged increasing independence, such as hand washing and face washing.

Mealtimes were relaxed and unhurried, and children were encouraged to be independent in serving and choosing their food. Staff were knowledgeable about children's allergies and dietary needs and followed clear processes to ensure safe practice. Following a recent incident, additional measures were implemented

to ensure hot food was checked appropriately before serving. The food was nutritious and menus planned using nutritional guidance for under fives. Some children experienced unnecessary waiting during the lunchtime period. For example, waiting on food to cool or waiting for space at the lunch table. The manager agreed to review routines to minimise this.

Children generally benefitted from consistent staff support; however, this was not always sustained. In some instances, a staff member asked a colleague to support a child rather than continuing to do so themselves, which resulted in less continuity of care.

Children's health and wellbeing were supported through the use of personal plans. Plans included information about medical needs and home routines, and staff used this knowledge effectively in practice. However, the quality of written plans did not always reflect staff's understanding of individual children. The service had identified this and was in the process of revising the plan format to support the inclusion of more detailed and meaningful information.

Parents were well informed about their children's experiences and were encouraged to be involved in their learning. Communication methods included informal discussions, a digital app, and a closed social media page. Parents told us they valued opportunities such as stay and play sessions and felt well informed about their child's day. A small number of parents expressed a desire for more information about their child's learning and development, which the service should continue to consider.

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	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Playing, learning and developing	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Children are supported to achieve	4 - Good
Nurturing care and support	4 - Good

To find out more

This inspection report is published by the Care Inspectorate. You can download this report and others from our website.

Care services in Scotland cannot operate unless they are registered with the Care Inspectorate. We inspect, award grades and help services to improve. We also investigate complaints about care services and can take action when things aren't good enough.

Please get in touch with us if you would like more information or have any concerns about a care service.

You can also read more about our work online at www.careinspectorate.com

Contact us

Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

enquiries@careinspectorate.com

0345 600 9527

Find us on Facebook

Twitter: @careinspect

Other languages and formats

This report is available in other languages and formats on request.

Tha am foillseachadh seo ri fhaighinn ann an cruthannan is cànan eile ma nithear iartras.

অনুরোধসাপেক্ষে এই প্রকাশনাটি অন্য ফরম্যাট এবং অন্যান্য ভাষায় পাওয়া যায়।

یہ اشاعت درخواست کرنے پر دیگر شکلوں اور دیگر زبانوں میں فراہم کی جاسکتی ہے۔

ਬੇਨਤੀ 'ਤੇ ਇਹ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਨ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਹੋਰਨਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਉਪਲਬਧ ਹੈ।

هذه الوثيقة متوفرة بلغات ونماذج أخرى عند الطلب

本出版品有其他格式和其他語言備索。

Na życzenie niniejsza publikacja dostępna jest także w innych formatach oraz językach.