

Cradlehall Nursery Day Care of Children

1 Cradlehall Court
Inverness
IV2 5WD

Telephone: 01463 794 445

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
25 February 2026

Service provided by:
Childcare Highland Ltd

Service provider number:
SP2015012472

Service no:
CS2015336577

About the service

Cradlehall Nursery is situated in a residential area of Inverness close to local amenities. The service provides care to a maximum of 52 children at any one time, aged from six weeks to those not yet attending primary school. The care service operates between 8:00 and 18:00, Monday to Friday, 52 weeks of the year.

The nursery consists of a reception area, three separate playrooms, nappy and toilet facilities, kitchen and office space. The pre-school room and toddler rooms each had direct access to enclosed outdoor play areas.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Monday 23rd February and Tuesday 24th February 2026, with feedback on Wednesday 25th February 2026. The inspection was carried out by one inspector 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:

- Observed practice and daily life.
- Spoke with the children using the service.
- Spoke with staff and the management team.
- Reviewed 29 completed questionnaires, 25 from family members and four from staff.
- Reviewed documents.
- Assessed core assurances, including the physical environment.

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.

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 were happy, relaxed and having fun as they explored and investigated both indoors and outdoors. They had opportunities to lead their own play and learning.
- Children continued to receive warm, caring and nurturing support from staff.
- Mealtimes were relaxed, unhurried and calm, Children had increasing opportunities for independence.
- The continued development of the outdoor space was a priority for the manager and staff.
- The manager and staff had established good working relationships with families. Parents were positive in their comments about the staff team, their friendliness and professionalism.
- Quality assurance processes should continue to be embedded to secure sustained improvements across the service.

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

We evaluated this heading as good, where there were important strengths within the setting's work and some aspects which could benefit from improvement.

Leadership and management of staff and resources

Since the last inspection, there had been some changes to the management team. They promoted a positive attitude to change and continuous improvement, and recognised the importance of working in partnership and involving all relevant stakeholders in self evaluation processes. Staff were positive about the service and felt included in the improvement journey, fostering a shared sense of responsibility and a positive team culture. Staff fully engaged with the inspection process and demonstrated a positive attitude towards change and improvement. Staff confidently discussed the changes they had already introduced in their playrooms to improve outcomes and experiences for the children.

The vision, values and aims of the nursery were reviewed shortly before the previous inspection and included: 'To be a responsive, creative, curious, child led centre at the heart of the community, where every child feels like learning' in an environment which is 'homely, positive and encouraging. Staff had been actively involved in the review process. The vision, values and aims were clearly on display in the reception area and were shared with all families. We encouraged the management team to consult with families and children during the next review, to ensure the vision and values reflect the current needs and wishes of children and families.

There was a clear improvement plan in place with identified, achievable priorities including, developing parental engagement and developing outdoor spaces to enhance outdoor play experiences. The manager and staff had made use of an online digital tool to illustrate progress in meeting identified priorities. This assisted the improvement plan to be used as a working document with progress being regularly recorded. This supported clearer oversight of what had been achieved and what still required action. We were able to see the improvements which had been made since the previous inspection and how they had impacted positively on children's experiences, their play, learning and development.

Staff advised that they felt actively involved in the ongoing evaluation and development of the service. They explained that the manager was a very regular visitor to each of the playrooms, as well as operating an open door policy to staff, children and their families. Staff could share any feedback and suggestions they might have. During team meetings the manager and staff reflected on practice, discussed the continuous improvement of the service and progress in meeting identified action points, and securing progression and positive outcomes for children. We reminded the management team to ensure that team meetings took place on a regular basis.

Parental engagement was an ongoing priority for the manager and staff. They recognised the value of parental feedback and welcomed any suggestions as to how the service could be improved. As well as daily informal contact during drop off and pick up times, parents were invited to spend time in the nursery and share in their child's care and learning. The management team and staff were considering how to promote further opportunities for parental engagement with the nursery. Parents confirmed that there were opportunities for them to be involved in the development of the service and felt listened to: 'They often asked for feedback, views or opinions are welcome', 'I feel I can voice any concerns or ideas and they'll be taken on board', 'We have been asked to provide feedback and I like how they hold parent evenings to

discuss and inform individual planning'.

Recruitment and induction followed clear, safe practices, in line with safer recruitment guidance. New staff benefitted from a structured induction. The management demonstrated a good understanding of their responsibilities in relation to the management of staffing and resources. Newer staff spoke positively about their induction and feeling part of the existing team.

Children play and learn 4 - Good

We evaluated this heading as good, where there were important strengths within the setting's work and some aspects which could benefit from improvement.

Playing, learning and development

Children were happy, relaxed and having fun as they explored and investigated both indoors and outdoors. The pace of the session was unhurried and children were able to lead their own play and learning. They benefited from positive and well considered learning environments that engaged them in their play and learning. Children confidently explored the various play experiences, independently selecting activities that captured their interests.

Children in each of the playrooms were engaged in their play and were skilfully supported by the majority of staff. Staff naturally got down to the children's level, showed interest, made good use of strategies such as open ended questions and 'I wonder questions', to spark and develop the children's curiosity, creativity and encourage them to extend their learning, whilst not directing their play. Good use was made of developmentally appropriate questions to extend and expand children's learning. We were able to observe good use of numeracy and mathematical language at different times, for example during a conversation with several children about their pets and talking about size.

Following the last inspection, improvements had been made to the range of resources available to children. Children benefitted from positive and well considered learning environments that engaged them in their play and learning. Each of the playrooms were now well laid out with a wide range of resources easily accessible to children. Good use was made of natural and loose parts resources, open ended and real life resources which sparked children's curiosity, supported problem solving and extended their imaginative play and thinking. Younger children were supported through experiences that promoted schematic and sensory play. The continued development of the outdoor space to extend the play and learning, including literacy and numeracy experiences, was an identified action point in the service's current improvement plan.

There were more opportunities for children to be engaged in and develop skills around language, literacy and numeracy both indoors and outdoors. As well as there being story corners both indoors and outdoors containing books and designated mark making areas, there were books and mark making opportunities in various areas across the playrooms and outdoors, for example recipe books in the home corner, mark making during messy play, number recognition and counting in the outdoor construction and garage role play areas. Good use was made of stories, songs and rhymes to support language skills across each of the playrooms.

Since the last inspection, there had been improvements to the quality and frequency of written observations which were shared with parents. Observations were now more evaluative and focus on children's learning. Children's progress and achievements were recorded and next steps identified. Management monitored observations as part of the ongoing quality assurance.

We discussed the benefits of dating when development overviews were being completed to highlight progression. Senior staff explained that they took account of the individual learning and next steps of children when completing intentional planning to plan experiences that support, challenge and extend learning.

Staff explained that they were still developing some planning processes and recognised the need for time to embed these. Some staff confidently used floor books to plan, capture and evaluate children's learning through play. This showed that children's voices and ideas were increasingly influencing spontaneous planning and learning. Management explained that further floor book training was to be made available to all staff in the very near future.

Staff knew children well and spoke confidently about their needs, interests and progress. As well as receiving daily informal feedback from staff about their child's learning and development, an online app was used to share children's learning journals with families. Staff recorded observations of children's progress, learning and development. Parents were then able to record comments and were also encouraged to add their child's learning, achievements and interests from home in their electronic journal. Parents commented: 'I like the electronic learning journal that is accessible 24-7', 'the app is excellent at informing us of my child's day, and the learning and progress with photos is great. I really like the comments the staff leave making it clear the learning and which target it is developing and also the space for me to respond' and 'I receive regular updates on how my son is doing'.

Children are supported to achieve 4 - Good

We evaluated this heading as good, where there were important strengths within the setting's work and some aspects, which could benefit from improvement.

Nurturing care and support

Children and their families all received a warm welcome when they arrived. Children were happy and settled in the setting. They received caring, nurturing and responsive care from staff which helped them to feel safe and secure. Staff knew the children well and recognised their cues and responded sensitively, providing comfort, cuddles and reassurance when needed. We observed positive interactions, and appropriate cuddles and comfort offered when needed. Feedback from parents supported this. Comments made included: 'My girls are happy going and seeing how the staff interact with them is really reassuring and gives me comfort knowing they are in a safe and happy place', 'My daughter gets very excited when she arrives and gives all members of the baby room a cuddle', 'As a parent of a child who is shy to speak out loud I appreciate the work they do with makaton', 'I find them all very approachable and caring'.

Increasing family engagement was a priority in the current nursery improvement plan. The management explained that they very much operated an open door policy where they welcomed families to spend time in the setting. The management and staff recognised the importance of establishing good working relationships with parents and the positive impact this had on outcomes for children. Open communication between parents and staff supported consistency and continuity of care. We observed parents being welcomed into the playrooms during drop off and pick ups and being provided with good levels of feedback about their child's day. Parents commented: 'Staff are always friendly and helpful. The feedback on my daughter is great', 'Handover/parents evening are always really excellent', 'There is a clear handover at the end of the day to parents and other staff will happily add to this and share stories of things that have happened',

Children's wellbeing was supported through effective personal planning approaches. Since the previous inspection, work had been completed to improve personal plans. All children had a clear personal plan in place which set out how nursery staff would meet their individual health, wellbeing and safety needs. Plans were completed and routinely reviewed with parents. Comments from parents supported this: 'I strongly agree we are included in developing and reviewing my son's personal care plan. Staff involve us in discussions about his needs, routines and development and they take my views into account. I feel listened to and valued as a parent and any updates or changes are communicated clearly', 'I receive regular updates on how my son is doing (against development milestones) and review and contribute to his personal plan regularly too', 'When they do personal plans, they've always noticed the same things I have and are helping my daughter with her development on the same things I am, so I always feel on the same page'.

The manager explained that they had been looking at how they could improve transitions. Staff understood the importance of supporting transitions, whether starting nursery, moving between rooms, moving to school or during daily routines. Transitions were flexible and supportive. Staff worked with parents to understand preferences and needs. New children were provided with a timetable of settling in sessions which was specific to them and which went at a pace which was right for them.

Snacks and mealtimes were calm and sociable, with staff sitting alongside children. They were relaxed and unhurried, allowing children to enjoy eating and chatting with friends and staff. Children were provided with home cooked lunches which took account of children's allergies and dietary requirements. Fresh water was readily available throughout the day to help children remain hydrated. Independence was promoted as children helped to prepare snack, collected their plates and self served their food, giving them a sense of responsibility and ownership of routines. Staff sat and had lunch with the children which provided opportunities to form and maintain relationships, and support the development of language, communication and social skills.

Personal care routines was carried out sensitively, in a nurturing and respectful manner, which supported children's dignity and promoted good health and hygiene habits. Safer sleep practices were promoted, and staff were attentive to children's individual needs. Sleep routines reflected family preferences and home practices, for example specific sleep times and comforters. This helped to create a sense of continuity, consistency of care and security 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 each child receives appropriate care and support and their needs are met, the provider, manager and staff should ensure:

- a) Personal plans, including protocols, set out children's current needs and how they will be met.
- b) All staff are aware of and understand the information within the personal plans and use this to effectively meet each child's needs.

c) Personal plans and protocols are routinely reviewed with parents and carers and, where necessary, updated.

d) Personal plans are organised and stored to allow easy access.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'My personal plan (sometimes referred to as a care plan) is right for me because it sets out how my needs will be met, as well as my wishes and choices'. (HSCS 1.15)

This area for improvement was made on 6 May 2024.

Action taken since then

As part of the inspection we looked at a random selection of personal plans across each of the three playrooms. These now contained more relevant and up to date information to allow staff to meet children's health, welfare and safety needs. There was also evidence that parents were involved in the development and review of their child's individual plan.

Personal plans were routinely monitored by the management team as part of their quality assurance processes.

For more detailed information, please refer to the recording under 'Children are supported to achieve - Nurturing care and support'.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

To promote children's continued learning, development and enjoyment, children should have access to a wide range of resources and experiences which are challenging and suitable to their individual interests and stages of development. There should be a sufficient amount of resources to enable children to make independent choices and engage in deep and meaningful play.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state: 'As a child, I can direct my own play and activities in the way that I choose, and freely access a wide range of experiences and resources suitable for my age and stage, which stimulate my natural curiosity, learning and creativity'. (HSCS 2.27)

This area for improvement was made on 6 May 2024.

Action taken since then

Since the last inspection, the manager and staff had reviewed the environment, the layout of the playrooms and the resources and experiences available.

Children now had access to a good range of resources and experiences which offered challenge and suitable to their individual interests and stages of development.

We saw children confidently making independent choices as to what they would like to do.

For more detailed information, please refer to the recording under 'Playing, learning and developing'.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 3

To support children to achieve, the provider should improve the approach and skills of staff in relation to planning for children's learning and tracking and monitoring their progress. Staff should be supported to develop their understanding of how to effectively observe and assess children's learning in order to plan quality learning experiences and meaningful next steps.

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)

This area for improvement was made on 6 May 2024.

Action taken since then

Staff have been supported to develop their skills in relation to planning for children's learning and tracking and monitoring their progress. Observations, tracking and planning were an item on the quality assurance calendar and they were routinely checked.

As part of the inspection, we looked at a random selection of online learning journals for children in each of the playrooms. We could see that observations were now more evaluative and linked to children's current interests and learning. We were able to see progression and identified next steps. There were also examples of parents sharing learning from home. Parents were all positive about the online journals and the quality of information they regularly received about their child's learning and development.

For further information, please refer to the recording under 'Playing, learning and developing'.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 4

The care service should have clear policies and procedures about sharing information with parents or other relevant persons in the child's life, including what to do in circumstances where a parent is not living with the child. Where a parent does not access the service these should be made available to them electronically.

This area for improvement was made on 30 January 2024.

Action taken since then

The service had reviewed their policies and procedures relating to sharing information with parents or other relevant persons in the child's life, especially those relating to information sharing with parents who may no longer live with the child. The management explained that they also ensured that there was greater clarity with parents at initial meetings and in written agreements, to reduce potential confusion as to what information and with whom they would share it.

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

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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