

# Escape to the Story Ltd

## Day Care of Children

North Crookedstone Cottage  
Limekilnburn Road  
Hamilton  
ML3 7XG

Telephone: 07769705215

**Type of inspection:**  
Unannounced

**Completed on:**  
11 March 2026

**Service provided by:**  
Escape to the Story Ltd

**Service provider number:**  
SP2023000341

**Service no:**  
CS2023000388

## About the service

Escape to the Story Ltd is a fully outdoor nursery based in South Lanarkshire. The service is registered to provide care to a maximum of 20 children aged 3 years to end of primary school. During term time this can be 20 children aged from 3 years to not yet attending primary school of whom 5 can be children of primary school age. During school holidays they are registered to provide a Holiday Club which can provide care to a maximum of 20 primary aged children.

The service was being provided from a secure, fenced area within the registered grounds. There were suitable toileting facilities and a small cabin providing shelter, when required. The space provides children with access to tree swings, large loose parts creating physical challenges, an animal sanctuary to learn about caring for small animals, a gardening plot to grow fruit and vegetables and other areas to be creative and learn skills such as woodwork, music and art and crafts. In addition to the fenced play space children can access the surrounding 5 acres of forestry and woodland.

At the time of the inspection 28 children were attending the service.

## About the inspection

This was an unannounced which took place on 10-11 March 2026 between 09:00 and 17:00. 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 registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since registration.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- observed the children's experiences
- gathered feedback from 25 families
- gathered feedback from five staff using a survey
- spoke with the staff and management present during the inspection
- observed staff practice
- assessed core assurances, including the physical environment
- 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, improvements were identified relating to core assurances. We have reported where improvement is necessary within the heading 'Children are supported to achieve'.

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

- The provider had an ambitious vision which focused on providing the highest quality of care and support.
- The provider promoted a partnership approach to self-evaluation and continuous improvement.
- Parents were extremely pleased with the outcomes for their children spending time outdoors and learning through play in a natural environment.
- Children were leading their own learning, making decisions about the types of play they wanted to participate in.
- Play spaces were continually being considered, in response to environmental changes and children's needs and interests.
- Children were engaged and having fun participating in lots of physical and risky play. They were enjoying exploring natural materials and transporting materials to extend their thinking and curiosity.
- Staff had a very good understanding of child development.
- Staff worked closely with other professionals, taking advice from the relevant agencies to support children's needs.

## 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	4 - 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**

The provider had an ambitious vision which focused on providing the highest quality of care and support. They aimed to deliver a child-led approach, driven by play and linked to nature. With the vision that children reached their social, emotional and physical milestones. The staff had recently reviewed the setting's aims reflecting on the outcomes for children. This helped them to remain focused on delivering a child led approach. They shared they had acted upon any improvements they had identified to further enhance children's learning.

Families had chosen this nursery because of the settings vision, values and aims. Parents shared they were extremely pleased with the outcomes for their children. Confirming their children were having positive experiences and having fun whilst learning.

Children were leading their own learning through play. They were confident within the setting and shared some of their learning with us. A group of children showed us around the garden area informing us about the vegetables they had planted. They shared how they would know when they were ready to pick. Another group of children were working as a team constructing a waterfall. They told us about the different roles they had taken on board from the project manager to the labourers. Children were confident and successful learners that were working in collaboration to achieve their goals.

The provider promoted a partnership approach to self-evaluation and continuous improvement. Staff shared with us that their voices were listened to and they felt their opinions mattered. Staff had effectively contributed to the settings improvement journey. Each member of staff was leading a development project that they believed enhanced children's experiences. Staff were working together embedding the settings values into the everyday life of the nursery.

The provider and staff had a very good understanding of their strengths and areas for further development. Self-evaluation and reflection were embedded into the settings daily practice. They were an extremely reflective team and used this to influence positive changes, sustaining positive outcomes for children. Staff told us their success was due to the provider being open to new ideas and welcoming their views. The provider was solution focused and encouraged staff to implement changes.

The provider had effective systems in place to ensure safer recruitment procedures were followed. When new staff joined the team, the provider during discussions created them a personalised induction. Inductions were planned around staff's needs, providing support and training to further enhance their skills and experience. Staff spoke very highly of training opportunities. They felt the dedicated time to have inhouse discussions, reflection time and strong teamwork had enabled them to be solution focused. They were proactive to ensure they continually provided positive outcomes for children. Staff were aware of best practice guidance and fully committed to delivering safe, nurturing and responsive care meeting children's needs.

## 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 setting was being provided from within a secured area. Risk assessments had been undertaken to identify possible hazards and reduce possible risk to children. This included a secured entrance monitored by staff. The entrance could only be opened from inside the secured area and a bell alerted staff someone was at the entrance. On entry children self-registered and staff recorded the number of children in attendance; this was clearly visible for staff to see. Staff were vigilant at knowing who they were caring for and how many children were in the setting.

The setting had continued to develop the facilities since registration in 2023. They had built some permanent buildings which included a toilet block and nappy changing facilities. We discussed some further enhancements needed to ensure children's privacy and dignity, when using these facilities. In addition, we suggested the provider considered the location of the nappy changing area with a focus on improving infection control. They agreed to act; we were informed some improvement had taken place before this report was written. The provider demonstrated willingness to take on board our suggestions.

A small cabin with a covered sheltered area and kitchen for staff to prepare foods had been built. This had been a positive development providing children shelter from the challenges weather can bring. Having a permanent kitchen area enabled staff to provide a wider range of healthy foods. The provider had acted swiftly on our suggestion to secure the kitchen and cleaning materials. The sheltered area was mostly used for children to have lunch. We found children all had lunch at the same time. Consideration could be given to permit children to choose when they wanted lunch. This could lead to a more positive lunch time. For example, by reducing number of children accessing the toilets and a smaller group sitting together could be more personalised and sociable. After lunch could be a more suitable time for children to brush their teeth.

Play spaces were continually being considered, in response to environmental changes and children's needs and interests. This included the enhancement of areas such as the garden for planting to support sustainability. The development of areas such as the music area and resources contributed to children learning to express their emotions through art, movement or sound. Staff had enthusiasm to further enhance the play areas and were looking forward to seeing how these developed throughout the seasons.

Children were engaged and having fun participating in lots of physical and risky play. They were enjoying exploring natural materials and transporting materials to extend their thinking and curiosity. Staff and children recognised the importance of looking after the space and materials. There was a strong focus on sustainability and respecting the natural environment.

We discussed the use of shelters around the setting to create more outdoor areas where children might choose to read stories, want to access a cosy area or take a rest. The provider agreed to consider how this could be further enhanced throughout the designated space. We acknowledged this will vary depending on seasonal impacts. However, as the nursery is a fully outdoor setting, we asked them to consider being creative about types of play offered inside the shelter and alternative shelters. They should continue to be creative, maintaining high quality outdoor learning through play.

## 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

The setting focus was for children to learn through play within a natural outdoor environment. The use of space and materials were of the highest quality. Staff were skilled at creating play experience to achieve this. Consideration had been given to the location of play areas within the secured area. For example, following consultation with children, parents and staff some areas have been relocated. One being the welcome area created at the entrance for children to self-register on arrival.

Staff had champion roles to further enhance the types of play on offer. They were working hard to ensure play spaces and materials supported children's natural curiosity to play and learn. Staff had a very good understanding of child development. They used learning from development opportunities, best practice and research to lead their champion role projects.

Children's right to play and access fresh air was truly evident within the setting. We observed children having fun and experiencing joy whilst learning. The experiences we observed were mostly child led with a few that staff had initiated. Children were leading the direction of their learning. We saw this in the garden area when they were looking for signs of spring and in the construction where they were working in teams to achieve their goals.

Staff shared how the setting had been working hard to provide experiences meeting children's needs. They told us about the monthly core story. They explained these were initiated by staff but through listening and observing children they create the story. Each story had a moral in place to support children's needs for example, the story introducing spring was how changes can be positive, this was to support children become more confident when changes happen.

Staff were using effective communications strategies to meet children's needs. They used visual aids, British Sign Language (BSL) and other strategies such as eye-to-eye contact and using a few words to give clear direction. Staff worked closely with other professionals, taking advice from the relevant agencies to support children's needs.

Staff skilfully knew when to observe and intervene. We observed staff observing and listening to children before getting involved in their play. The play experiences offered helped children to learn life skills, independence, confidence, creativity and to express themselves. Children were independent and the types of play offered should continue to help them enhance these skills. Children played well with their peers, sharing tasks, designating roles to help create and build their ideas and intentions.

Staff had reflected on the use of observations to recognise and extend children's learning. They were committed to ensure that the planning systems used supported and enhanced children's opportunities to learn through play. Next steps in children's play and learning were agreed with families. Staff regularly monitored children's progress and achievements. They supported children to recognise their achievements and celebrate successes.

### Children are supported to achieve 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: Nurturing care and support

When children started the setting, staff gathered the information needed to support their needs. Staff were skilled at supporting children's transitions and planned personalised settling in visits. Parents shared with us that they had formed positive relationships with staff. Parents told us staff were friendly, easy to talk to, caring and kind. Parents confirmed staff kept them well informed of their children's daily experiences and provided regular update on their progress.

Staff valued the families and children's opinions to enable them to provide a service meeting their expectations. To further enhance relationships following feedback from parents, staff made changes to the daily welcome routine. All staff now take turns to welcome children and open the gate. This had enabled parents and children to have increased contact with all the staff at the start and end of the day. Staff spent time with children when they entered the setting supporting them to self-register. Children had a smooth transition and positive start to their day.

All play spaces were open and children could freely choose where they want to play and learn throughout the day. A key worker system enabled a child's designated key staff to observe and monitor their experiences and progress. Staff were respectful of each child's needs and personal preferences. Children told us they liked attending the service and staff were nice. They told us they liked the swings, playing in the cabin, caring for the animals and playing with their friends.

Children had personalised plans in place which were regularly reviewed by staff and shared with families. Observations reflected children's experiences and learning. Staff worked closely with families, other settings and agencies to agree how best to support children's development. Personalised plans supported children's needs and interests, celebrating their successes. We acknowledged the setting had made improvements to how they planned to meet children's needs. However, consideration should be given to further enhance the tracking and monitoring systems used. For example, reflecting on the use of terms 'not on track' or 'not yet ready' and the impact these can have on children's planned experiences. The provider agreed to consider this going forward.

The service had policies in place to ensure children's health and wellbeing needs were met. Mealtimes were nutritious and children were encouraged to get involved in preparation, which included growing their vegetables and fruit. Mealtimes were sociable but we discussed with the setting to be mindful of the possible impact on children all eating at the same time. We identified improvements were needed to the service management of medication (see area for improvement 1).

## Areas for improvement

1. To meet children's health and wellbeing needs, the provider should ensure safe administration of medication procedures are followed. This includes but, is not limited to following best practice guidance for storage of medication and consent forms that provide staff with accurate information to administer medications safely.

This is to ensure the quality of the management is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards, (HSCS) which state that 'as a child, any treatment or intervention that I experience is safe and effective.' (HSCS, 1.24).

## 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

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Leadership and management of staff and resources	5 - Very Good
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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	4 - Good
Nurturing care and support	4 - Good

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