

Great Start Childcare Ltd Day Care of Children

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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
5 March 2026

Service provided by:
Great Start Childcare Ltd

Service provider number:
SP2013012154

Service no:
CS2013320163

About the service

Great Start Childcare Ltd is a daycare service for children, operating in partnership with West Dunbartonshire Council to provide funded provision for children aged 2-5 years. Located in the Milton area of West Dunbartonshire, the service is registered to care for up to 105 children, from six weeks old to those not yet attending primary school.

The early learning and childcare service is based in a standalone building, with sole use of the premises and a fully enclosed outdoor play area. The setting is on a bus route and close to local schools, parks, and shops.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 3, 4 and 5 March 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:

- Spoke with a small number of children using the service
- Spoke with four family members of children using the service
- Spoke with staff and management present on the days we visited the service
- Gathered feedback from eight staff members using a questionnaire
- Gathered feedback from 27 family members using a questionnaire
- Observed staff practice and children's experiences
- 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, no improvements were identified relating to the core assurances.

As part of this inspection, we also undertook a focus area. We have 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; and
- Children's engagement with the experiences provided in their service.

This information will be anonymised and analysed to help inform our future work with services.

Key messages

- Quality assurance approaches had been reviewed and were positively impacting on children's experiences.
- Staff were kind, caring, and nurturing, creating positive relationships that supported children's wellbeing and sense of security.
- The service should continue to review recruitment procedures in line with any changes to legislation and safer recruitment practices.
- Children were able to play and learn at their own pace, having fun as they explored the indoor and outdoor environment.
- Staff knew children well and responded to their individual needs, using personal and individual learning plans to support each child's interests, development, and next steps in learning.
- Settling-in and transition approaches were child-centred, flexible, and responsive.
- Children benefited from engaging indoor and outdoor play spaces that supported independence, curiosity, and active learning.
- Strong relationships with families contributed to a welcoming, inclusive, and supportive environment, helping families feel valued and involved in their children's learning.

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	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 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: Leadership and management of staff and resources

The service's vision, values, and aims were clearly displayed and embedded in practice. We observed that children were happy, settled, and cared for within a safe and stimulating environment. We discussed with management the importance of involving children and families in reviewing and shaping the service's vision, values, and aims, ensuring they continue to reflect the needs and aspirations of those using the service.

Management were actively engaged throughout the inspection and openly shared improvements made, demonstrating a clear understanding of how these enhanced children's experiences. Feedback gathered through discussions and questionnaires supported an inclusive culture where children, families, and staff felt listened to and involved in ongoing improvement. One parent commented that the nursery values parental input, includes families in decision-making, and ensures children's ideas are heard and acted upon, making them feel valued and involved.

Since the last inspection, management had strengthened self-evaluation in line with the quality improvement framework, introducing meaningful approaches suited to the setting. A realistic pace of change supported steady progress, with a focus on settling-in, transitions, early literacy, and play spaces. We saw a positive impact, with parents highlighting smooth transitions and a careful, child-centred approach. Improvements were evident across indoor and outdoor environments, and early literacy was consistently embedded across all playrooms. The nappy changing area had been further developed and now meets best practice guidance. Overall, these developments have positively impacted children's experiences and should continue to be built upon to sustain ongoing improvement.

A quality assurance and monitoring calendar set key priorities for children's play, learning, and development and promoted shared responsibility across the leadership team for monitoring. We observed that regular checks of accidents and medication were already in place and suggested adding these core activities to the calendar. This would enable the service manager to provide oversight, maintain consistency, and further support children's health, safety, and wellbeing.

An improvement plan was in place, with clear priorities for development, and we saw positive progress. Investment in the garden had created more opportunities for outdoor learning, with areas adapted to better meet the needs of younger children and provide age-appropriate experiences. The development of an outdoor 'caravan' classroom for older children further enriched their play and learning. Home learning packs had also been introduced, supporting family engagement and continuity between home and the setting. Staff should continue to build on these improvements.

Team meetings gave staff regular opportunities to discuss feedback and reflect on practice. Senior staff carried out playroom and planning audits and led reflective discussions, promoting peer evaluation. Staff reported that these sessions helped them develop a deeper understanding of the quality framework and how different aspects of practice connected, supporting ongoing improvements in children's experiences.

Recruitment procedures were in place to support the appointment of suitable staff; however, during a recruitment audit we identified that further consideration was needed in relation to disclosure processes. Management responded promptly, reviewing and updating the recruitment policy during the inspection to reflect current guidance. The service should continue to review procedures in line with changes to legislation and safer recruitment practices, including Disclosure Scotland requirements. This will ensure children are cared for by staff who have been recruited safely.

All staff were registered with the appropriate regulatory body, and systems were in place to monitor and track registration. Induction procedures had been strengthened, with the national induction resource used alongside the service induction to provide ongoing support. Newly recruited staff were guided by room seniors, helping build confidence in their roles. Staff described the team as welcoming and supportive. We saw that morale was positive, contributing to a confident, motivated workforce that supported children's care, learning, and overall experiences.

Leadership within the management team was visible and supportive, we could see that senior staff had developed in their roles, showing increased confidence, passion, and enthusiasm. The provider was actively involved in the day-to-day running of the service, engaging regularly with children, families, and staff. This approach fostered positive relationships, open communication, and a welcoming, caring culture, benefiting children, families, and staff.

Children play and learn 5 - Very Good

We found major strengths in this aspect of the settings work and identified very few areas for improvement, therefore we evaluated this quality indicator as very good.

Quality Indicator: Playing, learning and developing

Children were happy, confident, and engaged in their play. Staff joined sensitively, asked open-ended questions, and followed children's ideas, supporting choice, communication, and the development of early skills.

Play spaces were arranged to allow children to move freely and access resources independently. Since the previous inspection, staff had reflected on how spaces and resources were organised for younger children. Low-level storage, along with a range of baskets, encouraged exploration, curiosity, decision-making, and confidence.

Literacy and numeracy were woven throughout all areas. Children sang songs, listened to stories, and took part in mark-making, counting, measuring, sorting, and exploring shapes and colours. They recalled and retold familiar stories, joined rhyming activities, and used resources linked to their interests, helping them develop and build early literacy and numeracy skills.

Babies experienced rich sensory play with natural and textured materials. Cosy areas with books and cushions provided calm spaces for comfort and connection. They explored water, sand, paint, fruit, bubbles, and role play with dolls and prams. Staff spoke with babies and encouraged and supported them in play, helping them develop curiosity, early communication, and a sense of security.

Younger children enjoyed a variety of sensory and creative experiences, including sand, playdough, blocks, and mark-making. They explored open-ended materials and construction activities, building and experimenting with their ideas.

During a three little pigs story activity, children built houses and blew them down, supporting imagination, coordination, and participation. Dressing up encouraged role play, social interaction, and joy. Staff supported children's communication and engagement, helping toddlers develop confidence, coordination, and early social skills.

Older children explored sand, water, blocks, trains, paint, playdough, and remote-control toys. Imaginative play areas included natural materials, loose parts, and block play, supporting creativity, problem-solving, and construction. They experimented with colour mixing, created patterns, and explored different ways to express themselves through music and movement. Staff interactions encouraged thinking and extended children's ideas. During a larger group activity, children were laughing and having fun with materials and props while singing, developing confidence, curiosity, and enjoyment.

Both younger and older children developed practical life skills through play. They used age-appropriate knives to chop vegetables, indoors and in the mud kitchens outdoors, promoting independence, coordination, and problem-solving.

Outdoor play was an enjoyable and valued part of each day. Children made very good use of the improved outdoor spaces, including a refurbished caravan, sand area, pirate ship with telescope, loose parts, sheltered zones, guttering, tyres, a water wall, ball-rolling activities, and climbing equipment. These experiences supported exploration and schematic play. Parents noted 'outdoor play every day, even in the rain' and described the area as 'brilliant and often used by the children.'

Children enjoyed walks in the local community and regular park visits, supporting physical development, social skills, and connections with the wider community. The service planned to re-introduce forest school sessions to further enhance understanding of the natural environment, safety, and risk awareness.

Families shared their experiences of the wide range of activities. One parent said, 'There are so many experiences available, we love the different themes. They can learn about different cultures and try new food. My child loves writing letters and numbers.' Another commented, 'My child loves messy and sensory play, especially light-up toys.' A further comment highlighted, 'My child enjoys outings in the local community and recently loved the fire service visiting. There's always a variety of fun experiences and 'They also loved the Gruffalo home-link bag'.

Children also accessed the soft play area and the 'Great Start Gym,' which included child-sized equipment, balance beams, a punch bag, and a quiet area for yoga. Families welcomed these areas, and children were enthusiastic about exploring them.

Staff reflected on practice to support learning, using digital apps to capture observations and photos of children's development, progress, and achievements. Families contributed learning from home, and parents said, 'The app and journals are regularly updated, it's great to see what they do all day' and 'It's lovely to see on my breaks that my little one is having lots of fun exploring'.

Planning systems were well established, supporting meaningful experiences aligned with national guidance. Staff adapted planning to children's interests and developmental needs, and senior staff and the early stages teacher regularly reviewed trackers with keyworkers to support and challenge learning. Senior staff should continue to oversee resources and experiences for babies to ensure they consistently meet their needs. Overall, children were supported to explore, play, and learn at their own pace, developing confidence, independence, and new skills.

Children are supported to achieve **5 - Very Good**

We found major strengths in this aspect of the settings work and identified very few areas for improvement, therefore we evaluated this quality indicator as very good.

Quality Indicator: Nurturing care and support

Children experienced warm, responsive care from staff who knew them well and were attentive to their individual needs. Staff demonstrated a nurturing approach, building caring relationships by listening, responding, and engaging meaningfully with children throughout the day. One parent said, 'they are always greeted with a smile'.

Settling-in visits were flexible and tailored to each child and family, giving parents the opportunity to share important information with staff and keyworkers. Feedback was gathered about the settling-in process to ensure it met the needs of children and families. We observed a baby being comforted with cuddles, familiar songs, and favourite toys, helping them feel safe, secure, and begin forming trusting relationships.

Transitions were well planned and child-centred, with enhanced transitions already in place for some children. Routines had been adapted to reflect the needs of individual children and families, supporting transitions at a pace that was right for them. Approaches between rooms and onto school were regularly reviewed. A transition display, including photographs of the school, helped children become familiar with their next environment and encouraged conversations about change. Parents felt well informed and involved. As a result, children experienced continuity of care and approached transitions with confidence, security, and a sense of belonging.

Children's wellbeing was supported through personal planning. Each child had a personal plan completed and reviewed with parents, including "All About Me" information, routines, likes and dislikes, healthcare needs, and "How Am I Doing" records, which supported staff in meeting children's individual care and learning needs. Personal learning plans outlined next steps, and children requiring additional support had individual plans in place, with staff working in partnership with other professionals where needed to ensure children received the right support at the right time.

Personal care routines were carried out gently and respectfully. Staff encouraged independence while maintaining privacy and dignity. Children were supported and praised as they learned to wipe noses, clean faces, wash hands, and manage toileting, helping them build confidence in self-care.

Children's wellbeing was further supported through opportunities to rest and relax. Safe sleep practices were followed, with staff monitoring sleeping children, and cosy spaces within playrooms allowed children to relax and recharge, helping them feel rested and ready to play.

Mealtimes were calm, relaxed, and unhurried, with children sitting with peers and staff and enjoying sociable interaction. Staff understood children's dietary and health needs and encouraged independence appropriate to each stage of development. Babies practised self-feeding and drinking from open cups, while older children helped set tables, serve food, and take on roles such as "lunch helper." Menus followed national guidance, and fresh drinking water was available throughout the day. As a result, children experienced positive, enjoyable mealtimes that promoted independence, social skills, and healthy routines.

Medication procedures were carefully managed, with appropriate storage, monitoring, and recording. Staff regularly reviewed medication records alongside children's health care plans to ensure each child received the support they required. Accident and incident forms were completed and shared with families. Most staff were first aid trained, enabling them to respond should an emergency arise. As a result, children's health and wellbeing were well supported.

Appropriate arrangements were in place to keep children safe and protected. A child protection policy and procedures were available. Staff had completed training, demonstrating a strong understanding of their responsibilities and the actions to take if they had concerns, helping to prioritise children's safety and wellbeing.

Families were warmly welcomed into the service, creating a positive and inclusive environment. Building strong relationships and partnerships with families was a key priority. One parent said, 'I feel welcomed into the service and greeted warmly by staff. I feel comfortable asking questions and sharing updates from home, staff are open and responsive in return. This open communication helps me feel reassured and involved in their nursery experience'.

Family engagement was supported through a range of opportunities, including parents' evenings, volunteering, trips, and home learning initiatives. For example, one parent shared that they came in to read a story to the children. In response to parent interest, the service had recently planned dates for their first stay-and-play session, providing further ways for families to be involved in nursery life.

Families commented positively on staff care and relationships, saying, 'I feel like my child is really liked by the staff and I get the feeling they really care for them', 'The staff have shown our child love and make them feel special. It feels like we're leaving them with their Aunties', and that the nursery had 'the most appropriate name' as their child had definitely had "a great start".

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

The provider should take appropriate action to meet best practice guidance "Care Inspectorate, Nappy Changing for early learning and childcare settings (excluding childminders), Publication date : July 2023 (updated February 2024)" to ensure positive outcomes for children.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which states that: 'If I require personal care, there is a suitable area for this, including a sink if needed (HSCS 5.4) and Care Inspectorate, Nappy Changing for early learning and childcare settings (excluding childminders), Publication date July 2023 (updated February 2024)'

This area for improvement was made on 28 January 2025.

Action taken since then

The nappy changing facilities for children under 3 years old was satisfactory and in line with best practice guidance. This area for improvement has now 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	5 - Very Good
Playing, learning and developing	5 - Very Good
Children are supported to achieve	5 - Very Good
Nurturing care and support	5 - Very Good

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