

Kinlochbervie Nursery Day Care of Children

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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
5 March 2026

Service provided by:
Highland Council

Service provider number:
SP2003001693

Service no:
CS2019372995

About the service

Kinlochbervie Nursery is a day care of children service situated in the village of Kinlochbervie in Sutherland. The service operates as part of the North West Sutherland Schools 3 -18 campus from a village hall close to the primary and secondary schools.

The service is registered to provide a care service for a maximum of 16 children aged 2 years to not yet attending primary school.

The service is situated within a residential area of the village, area near local amenities including a shop, a play park and the shore. Children are cared for in a purpose built annexe to the village hall with two playrooms, a fully enclosed outdoor area and it's own entrance. Children can access facilities at the primary and secondary schools such as the gym hall and library.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Tuesday 03 March, between 09:15 and 15:30 , and Wednesday 04 March 2026, between 09:15 and 10:50. This 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, complaints information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered throughout the inspection year. To inform our evaluation we:

- spoke/spent time with children using the service and five of their family members
- received six completed questionnaires which included two received from families/carers of children, and four received from staff
- spoke with staff and the management team
- assessed core assurances, including the physical environment
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents
- spoke with a visiting professional

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

Children experienced warm, nurturing care and support from responsive staff.

- Children's snack experiences promoted social interaction and a relaxed, homely atmosphere, enhanced by staff eating with the children.
- Children's overall wellbeing benefitted from families being welcomed daily into the playroom which helped children to settle well and promoted partnership working with parents.
- There was scope to broaden messy and sensory play opportunities, such as painting, waterplay to support and extend problem solving and creativity.
- Processes for planning, observation, and next steps were still developing, with the staff recognising that these needed to become more cohesive.
- We acknowledged the impact of operational pressures that could arise across the manager's wider remit as depute head of a 3-18 campus. The provider must review current arrangements to ensure leadership capacity is sufficient to drive improvement.
- Staff communicated regularly and effectively, ensuring children moved safely between spaces.

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	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Children thrive and develop in quality spaces	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 3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

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

Leadership and management of staff and resources

We acknowledged that the current leadership arrangements did not allocate enough resources for the manager to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. The wider remit of the manager led to competing demands, resulting in limited capacity of time. This meant that processes to support self-evaluation and improvement were at an early stage and had not been sufficiently developed to drive sustained change and improvement. The provider must review current arrangements to ensure leadership capacity is sufficient to drive improvement.

(See Requirement 1).

The manager had taken steps to develop and implement some quality assurance systems. For example, some support and supervision for staff had been implemented but had not been sustained. The manager regularly spent time with the staff team as they worked, enabling staff to share questions and ideas. This informal approach did not allow a structure of setting timescales and reviewing actions. This meant that plans in place for maintaining and improving the service were not yet fully supported by a robust process to ensure timely implementation and review.

Some improvements related to a requirement made at a previous inspection had not been consistently embedded, with some aspects remaining unmet (see section, **What the service has done to meet any requirements made at or since the last inspection**). For example, staff were starting to reflect on their work using the national quality framework. The manager must provide further support and guidance to continually develop their self-evaluation skills. We agreed to extend the timescale of this requirement.

Requirements

1.

By 03 September 2026, the provider must ensure children receive positive outcomes. To achieve this, sufficient time and resources must be allocated to ensure the leadership role is carried out effectively.

This is to comply with Regulation 4(1)(a) (Welfare of users) of The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/210).

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

'I use a service and organisation that are well led and managed' (HSCS 4.23).

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.

Children experience high quality spaces

Children were enabled to direct their own play in an indoor environment where resources were well organised, easily accessible, and invitingly presented, encouraging them to explore freely. Staff had worked hard to develop the indoor environment, creating clearly defined areas with ample room for floor play. This ensured the space did not feel cluttered or overly busy. This supported children to make independent choices and to remain engaged in their play. Children were observed using natural, real life materials, such as fabrics to create "lava" for volcano play in the sand tray. While these experiences supported creativity and problem solving, there was scope to broaden messy and sensory play opportunities, such as painting, water play and other sensory experiences. This would help support and broaden developmentally appropriate play and learning.

The service recognised the importance of daily outdoor play and experiences and had identified that the outdoor area required further development. They supported children to enjoy regular outdoor play with visits to the local play park, which provided elements of riskier and more varied physical play, including climbing activities. These experiences supported children's physical development. We suggested that some of the stimulating experiences children enjoyed indoors, such as creating volcanoes, could be replicated outside. This could encourage children's interests and curiosity about the wider world, as well as supporting overall wellbeing.

Children's health and wellbeing benefitted from consistent handwashing routines. Children were supervised washing their hands at key times to ensure this was done effectively. They were encouraged to learn about the importance of good hygiene by helping to wipe clean tables, for example, before eating.

Children's wellbeing and security were supported by staff who demonstrated a strong awareness of general protective measures. Clear processes were in place to manage security within the setting. For example, children understood that only adults answered the door, which helped reinforce their sense of safety. Staff maintained good knowledge of where children were at all times, communicating regularly and effectively with one another to ensure children moved confidently and appropriately between spaces.

Children play and learn 3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

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

Playing, learning and developing

Children experienced a nurturing environment where they were generally encouraged to lead their own play. Staff supported emerging interests by planning in the moment to build on current curiosities, such as volcanoes and space. This supported children's natural curiosity and creativity. While staff responded well to children's interests, there was not yet a balance between responsive and intentional planning. Floorbooks captured children's interests and some evidence of learning. We suggested that these could be further

developed to capture both responsive and intentionally planned play and learning experiences. This would support individual progress as well as supporting interests and curiosities. We signposted the staff to the early years curriculum document, *Realising the Ambition*, to support improvement.

The service was in the early stages of implementing a digital platform to capture children's progress and experiences. Parents were accessing the digital platform regularly, enabling them to share in children's successes, achievements and to engage in children's day to day activities and interests. Some observations showed what children were progressing in their learning. Staff missed opportunities to fully support children to achieve as next steps were not always identified. The service was in the process of developing this approach. They recognised that further work was needed to ensure that high-quality assessment practices tied in with the development of effective planning systems. Overall, the processes for planning, observation, and next steps were still developing, and the team recognised that these needed to become more cohesive.

Children's learning and development benefitted from some quality interactions. Consistently warm, positive and responsive interactions contributed to a nurturing and supportive environment. We suggested that focused, more consistent monitoring of staff practice would support them to further develop skills in this area. This could help strengthen the quality of interactions across the setting.

Children's development of literacy and numeracy knowledge and understanding was supported in a variety of ways. Staff encouraged children to count, recognise numbers around them and to make marks as part of play. For example, using emergent writing, one child made a "no jumping" sign for a pretend swimming pool. While books were attractively displayed across different areas of the playroom, children were not seen to be regularly read to. This minimised children's opportunities to develop early language skills, experience rich vocabulary, and build positive relationships with books through shared reading experiences.

Children benefited from being able to build connections within the wider community. We saw photos of visits to the local park and walks to the local shop, enabling children to explore their community. These experiences enriched children's learning and supported their physical development. Consistent self-evaluation of learning experiences would help enable better understanding of their impact on children's play, learning, and development. Using best practice guidance, such as *Realising the Ambition*, would support this process to align with best practice.

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.

Nurturing care and support

Children experienced warm, responsive care that nurtured their wellbeing. Some skilful interactions enabled children to express their needs effectively. For example, children were supported to play alone if they wished. Staff sensitively encouraged them to indicate if they would like to play with others at a later point. This demonstrated to children that their views and choices were supported and valued. Families were encouraged to visit and spend time in the nursery. During the inspection a parent stayed in the playroom until their child was settled. This approach supported positive relationships between families and staff and contributed to a welcoming and inclusive ethos.

The information gathered in children's personal plans, including chronologies, was used effectively to track changes in children's home lives, health, wellbeing, and development. These were reviewed within required timescales, and staff considered the wellbeing indicators in relation to the information provided by families. This enabled staff to identify care and support needs promptly. They worked in partnership with parents, ensuring that children received the right support at the right time.

Children's snack experiences promoted social interaction and a relaxed, homely atmosphere, enhanced by staff eating with the children. Children were offered opportunities to be involved in mealtime routines. Staff encouraged children who were less adventurous with food, supporting them to try lunch provided by the service along with their own food. A rolling snack approach could be considered to support children to continue to play until they were ready for snack. Children's water bottles were available at child height throughout their day. Further encouragement from staff may have helped children better understand the importance of staying hydrated. Staff recognised there was an opportunity to work with parents to strengthen shared understanding of national healthy eating guidance.

Children's dignity and privacy were respected. Staff checked in discreetly as children were developing independence in toileting. They reassured children that help was available if needed, while still allowing them to choose when they wanted assistance. This approach supported children's confidence, independence, and sense of security during toileting routines.

What the service has done to meet any requirements we made at or since the last inspection

Requirements

Requirement 1

The provider and manager must develop and implement an effective system of quality assurance to monitor and improve all areas of practice and improve outcomes for children.

To achieve this, the provider and manager must:

- a) implement regular and effective support and supervision for all staff;
- b) involve staff in the systematic evaluation of their work and the work of the service;
- c) put clear and effective plans in place for maintaining and improving the service;
- d) ensure the leadership team effectively monitors the work of each member of staff and the service as a whole; and
- e) undertake effective audits of medication records and processes.

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

'I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes.' (HSCS 4.19)

It is also in order to comply with the Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011/210 - Regulation 3 Principles and Regulation 15 (a) and (b) Staffing.

This requirement was made on 22 June 2022.

Action taken on previous requirement

Some informal staff practice monitoring had taken place. Focused practice monitoring could provide staff with feedback to enable them to further develop their skills, for example, in delivering high quality interactions. Staff told us the manager was supportive and approachable although regular opportunities for support and supervision meetings had not been sustained. This impacted on plans to maintain and improve the service.

Staff were reflective in conversations. They had begun to evaluate their work, and that of the service, against 'A quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors: early learning and childcare'. Further input from the manager would support staff to develop their skills in this area. For example, in evidencing the "How do we know?" aspect of the self-evaluation process.

We were unable to assess whether audits of medication records and processes were effective as, at the time of inspection, as none of the children attending the service required medication.

We acknowledged the impact of operational pressures that could arise across the manager's wider remit as depute head of a 3-18 campus. This included the management of two further ELC settings. When operational pressures increased, this meant the manager's capacity for robust quality assurance sometimes decreased as a result. Taking this into account we made a new requirement (see section, Leadership and management of staff and resources requirement 1).

This requirement has not been met and we agreed an extension until 03 September 2026.

Not 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

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Children experience high quality spaces	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

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