

Spinney Lane Nursery School Day Care of Children

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Edinburgh
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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
30 March 2026

Service provided by:
City of Edinburgh Council

Service provider number:
SP2003002576

Service no:
CS2003015860

About the service

Spinney Lane Nursery School is a day care of children service provided by the City of Edinburgh council. The service is registered to provide care to a maximum of 64 children not yet attending primary school at any one time.

The service is provided from a stand-alone nursery building, on the grounds of Gilmerton primary school. This includes two playrooms and free flow access to the outdoors. The service is located close to shops, transport links and other local amenities.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 25 March 2026 between 9:15 and 15:15 and 26 March between 8:40 and 15:00. 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 previous inspection findings, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with children using the service
- reviewed feedback from 17 families using our digital questionnaire
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- 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 in relation 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 were happy, confident and having fun at nursery. They had formed positive and nurturing relationships with staff, which helped them feel safe and secure.
- Children were able to play and learn at their own pace, as they explored the indoor and outdoor environment.
- Children were very well supported during transitions, both from home to nursery and onto school.
- Children benefited from strong relationships between staff and families. They fostered an environment where children and families felt valued and respected, resulting in an inclusive ethos.
- Well-considered, realistic and purposeful improvement planning ensured high-quality play and learning was at the heart of service developments.

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 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 5 - Very Good

Quality indicator: Leadership and management of staff and resources

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.

The leadership team and staff demonstrated a shared and clear understanding of the service's vision, values and aims. These had been recently reviewed to ensure they remained relevant and reflective of current practice. They were distinctive to the service and underpinned by a strong, collective ethos. Children's wellbeing and experiences were consistently placed at the centre of practice and decision making.

The environment clearly reflected the service's core values of nurture, respect and achievement. It was welcoming, well-maintained and responsive to children's interests and changing needs throughout the day. Staff consistently demonstrated values-based practice. They were warm, responsive and attentive, taking time to listen to children. They acknowledged and validated their feelings and engaged meaningfully at children's level. As a result, children were confident, settled and secure and they experienced relationships that were nurturing and respectful.

Distributive leadership was well-established. Staff were encouraged and supported to lead areas of improvement, including woodland learning and the development of literacy and numeracy. These leadership opportunities enabled staff to develop expertise, take ownership of improvement priorities and share effective practice within and beyond the service. This approach supported professional growth and contributed to sustained improvement.

Self-evaluation was purposeful and embedded across the service. Staff regularly engaged in reflective activities, using recognised best practice guidance to identify strengths and areas for development. A range of self-evaluation tools supported this process. Improvement planning was well considered, appropriately paced and clearly focused on improving outcomes for children and families. The improvement plan aligned well with the wider school improvement plan, while remaining relevant to the early learning and childcare context.

The views of children and families were used effectively to inform improvement. Children shared their views through a range of approaches, including discussions, 'floor books' and voting systems. Families contributed through questionnaires, sharing learning folders, consultations and daily informal communication. This ensured that children's and families' voices remained central to service development and supported responsive and meaningful change.

Quality assurance and monitoring processes were robust and appropriately timed. These included the use of data, audits and observations to evaluate practice and inform improvement. The processes supported the identification of areas for development, such as strengthening observation records and the use of tracking information, to better support children's next steps in learning. Audits relating to practice, medication management and accident and incident records helped staff maintain high standards, promote children's safety and enhance wellbeing. Children's experiences were central to this evaluation, including observing how environments were used before and after changes were made.

The service benefited from a skilled, stable and consistent staff team, which supported continuity of care for children. Staff reported induction arrangements were thorough and effective, enabling staff to clearly understand their responsibilities. Staff acknowledged that periods of staff absence could present challenges, however, they worked collaboratively, responded flexibly to children's individual needs and felt well-supported by colleagues and the leadership team.

Children play and learn 5 - Very Good

Quality indicator: Playing, learning and developing

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.

Children experienced a high standard of care and learning within a nurturing, inclusive and responsive environment. They were engaged and motivated through a well-balanced combination of carefully planned and responsive learning opportunities. They were supported to lead their own play with increasing independence, which had a positive impact on their confidence, emotional wellbeing and overall development.

Experiences were meaningful and purposeful, with staff effectively supporting children to make connections and extend their interests. This was particularly evident through the sustained exploration of ammonites and fossils across both days of the inspection. Staff built on this interest by providing a range of appropriate experiences, such as measuring fossils, sorting dinosaurs by size and extending early literacy skills, including letter recognition. These approaches deepened children's learning and supported progression.

Children had access to a wide range of resources indoors and outdoors. The learning environment provided sufficient time and space for children to make choices and lead their own play, strengthening their independence and sense of wellbeing. Children demonstrated creativity and problem solving skills, for example when constructing a house, they discussed together the use of an engine "to make things work." This demonstrated motivation and ownership of their own learning. Peer interactions were positive, with children displaying confidence in their relationships and a strong sense of belonging within the setting.

Staff interactions were consistently warm, nurturing and responsive, contributing to secure attachments and effective learning. Staff used open-ended questions, descriptive commentary and "wondering aloud" to extend children's thinking and promote the development of critical thinking skills. Experiences were well matched to children's developmental stages and supported learning across literacy, numeracy, creativity and problem solving. Books and sensory materials were used purposefully to enhance engagement and deepen learning.

Outdoor learning was a clear strength of the service. Free flow access for most of the day supported children's curiosity, exploration and independence. Children benefited from extended opportunities to engage meaningfully with the outdoor environment. 'Woodland Wednesday' further enriched children's experiences, supporting the development of risk management skills, teamwork and respect for the natural world. Activities such as caring for wildlife and making bird feeders promoted responsibility and environmental awareness.

The service demonstrated a strong commitment to child-centred planning. Observation, assessment and tracking systems were in place and used effectively to ensure clear progression in children's learning. Information gathered was used well during planning meetings to identify children's strengths and next steps, enabling targeted support. Children's voices were evident within observations, and reflective summaries supported continuity in learning.

Parents spoke very positively about the experiences provided for their children. One parent commented, "Overall I feel the nursery provides a fantastic learning environment with a huge emphasis on empathy and kindness, resulting in well-rounded children who are ready for school." Another parent highlighted the service's commitment to real life learning experiences, such as the local hedgehog investigation. Some parents expressed a wish for more frequent updates and photographs, to further support communication about their child's experiences at the service.

Children are supported to achieve 5 - Very Good

Quality indicator: Nurturing care and support

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.

Children experienced warm, responsive and nurturing care, which effectively supported their emotional wellbeing and development. Staff interactions were consistently warm, respectful and responsive. They were attentive to children providing reassurance and support promptly, which helped children feel safe, secure and valued. Staff demonstrated a strong understanding of their key children and were able to clearly articulate children's progress, including recognising small, but significant developmental achievements. Parent comments included, "I feel so lucky that my child can attend Spinney Lane" and "The staff are amazing and do so much for everyone. It's great."

Transitions were very well-managed. Flexible, individualised settling-in arrangements supported children and families to build confidence and familiarity with the setting. Children benefited from participation in the 'Peep programme', school visits and strong links with the wider school community. This ensured continuity of learning, and supported positive progression for children as they moved on to their next stage.

Children's health and wellbeing needs were effectively supported through robust, personal planning processes. Chronologies were detailed, accurate and up to date, with care and medical plans in place, where required. Planning was child-centred and developed in partnership with families and relevant professionals, ensuring that children received timely and appropriate support. Families consistently reported feeling listened to and reassured about their child's care. One parent commented, "Spinney is a very inclusive nursery and supports children with a variety of additional needs."

The service made effective use of visual supports and communication approaches, including visual resources, 'Signalong' and structured programmes. These approaches enhanced children's understanding, communication and inclusion, particularly for those requiring additional support. Communication and planning documentation was comprehensive, and clearly demonstrated reflective practice and effective multi-agency working.

Personal care routines were carried out sensitively and with respect. Staff consistently encouraged children's independence, while maintaining privacy and dignity. Children were positively supported and praised as they learned self-care skills, such as washing hands and managing toileting, which helped to build confidence and independence.

Mealtimes were calm, relaxed and generally well-organised, offering children positive dining experiences. Children were supported and encouraged to participate in mealtime routines, including snack preparation, setting tables and clearing away. This contributed to the development of independence, confidence and communication skills. Staff sat with children during meals, modelling positive behaviour and facilitated purposeful conversation. On occasions, staff were required to leave tables to support serving. We discussed the benefit of allocating a designated staff member to this role, in order to minimise movement and maintain consistency.

Strong, respectful relationships with families were a clear strength of the service. Family engagement was promoted through regular opportunities for formal and informal communication with staff regarding children's care and development. Visits, stay-and-play sessions and family events helped families feel welcomed, valued and involved. These positive partnerships supported children's emotional security and contributed to improved outcomes.

Parents shared the following comments:

"The staff at Spinney Lane are wonderful. They truly care about the children and families, and we are proud to think of ourselves as part of the Spinney family."

"The environment is friendly, nurturing and very focused on parental involvement. The staff are approachable, caring and clearly dedicated to the children's wellbeing and learning."

"Overall, we couldn't be happier with Spinney Lane. It's a truly special place that brings out the best in our child."

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	5 - Very Good
Leadership and management of staff and resources	5 - Very 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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