

Nether Robertland Early Childhood Centre Day Care of Children

Cairnduff Place
Stewarton
Kilmarnock
KA3 5QF

Telephone: 01560 484 934

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
7 April 2026

Service provided by:
East Ayrshire Council

Service provider number:
SP2003000142

Service no:
CS2003016958

About the service

Nether Robertland Early Childhood Centre is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 120 children not yet attending primary school at any one time. Of those 120, no more than 120 are three years to those not yet attending primary school. The nursery is provided by East Ayrshire Council and is located within the town of Stewarton.

The nursery operates from a purpose-built premises with two mezzanine areas. The outdoor space was taken into account when agreeing the maximum number of children. Children must always have access to the outdoor space. The nursery has its own secure door entry system and each playroom has access to a secure outdoor area. The service is close to local amenities, green spaces, parks, and transport links.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 24, 25 and 26 March 2026 between 09:00 and 17:30. This inspection was carried out by three inspectors from the Care Inspectorate. To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included previous inspection findings, registration and complaints information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered throughout the inspection year.

To inform our evaluation we:

- Spoke and spent time with children using the service. We also spoke with five friends and family members.
- Received six completed questionnaires.
- Spoke with 14 staff and the management team. We also received 11 completed staff questionnaires.
- Observed practice and daily life.
- Reviewed documents.
- Spoke with one visiting professionals.

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.

Key messages

- Children were happy, cared for and felt safe, with kind staff who helped them build friendships and feel comfortable in the nursery.
- Children were confident and motivated in their play, making good use of indoor and outdoor spaces and available resources.
- Warm, caring and respectful relationships were a strong feature of the service, supporting children's confidence, friendships and sense of belonging.
- Staff planned activities for the children, but planning did not always follow what individual children were interested in, meaning some children were less engaged.
- Personal planning and partnerships with families contributed positively to children's experiences. Families described the service as welcoming and caring, and most children were settled and enjoying nursery.

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 leadership and management as good, as a number of important strengths had a positive impact on children's experiences. While there were areas for further development, these were known to leaders and did not significantly detract from outcomes for children and families.

Leaders had established a clear and shared vision of providing a safe, calm and nurturing environment where children and families were known and valued. This was evident across the setting. Children experienced a calm atmosphere which supported their wellbeing and helped them to feel secure and settled throughout the day.

The service's stated values of being nurturing, kind, compassionate, friendly and supportive were increasingly reflected in practice. Staff demonstrated warmth in their interactions and positive relationships were evident. Where staff recognised behaviour as communication, children were supported with sensitivity and understanding. This helped children to regulate their emotions and feel respected.

Leaders had clear arrangements to review the vision, values and aims on a recurring basis. Families and staff were involved in this process through consultation activities, including parent groups. Children's voices were also considered, supporting a sense of shared ownership. This inclusive approach helped families feel listened to and contributed to positive relationships between families and the service.

Leaders had begun to embed a culture of reflection and improvement. Self evaluation activities had resulted in real changes to the environment. For example, leaders reviewed room layouts to better meet children's needs. Block play was relocated to a more appropriate space, snack and playdough areas were moved, and zones of learning were introduced. These changes improved children's access to resources and supported engagement in play. Where learning areas were thoughtfully organised, children were more involved and able to sustain their play. Leaders recognised the importance of maintaining connections across learning, including opportunities for mark making and numeracy within play areas, and agreed to ensure this was rolled out in all areas of the service.

Improvement planning was in place and informed by evidence. Plans were being developed as a working document to support ongoing reflection. This approach meant leaders were beginning to track progress more effectively and identify next steps for improvement.

Children, families and staff were involved in self evaluation through a parent council and opportunities for children to share their views via group discussions. This supported inclusive improvement planning and ensured changes were responsive to the needs of the community.

Safe recruitment processes were in place through the local authority. Induction arrangements supported new staff, with reference to national induction guidance, although staff awareness of this was variable.

Staff told us they felt supported by senior leaders. Regular supervision and team meetings were held, with actions identified and reviewed. Teamwork was evident, and staff spoke positively about improvements in communication and consistency of staffing over recent months.

Leadership groups had been established, allowing staff to lead areas such as health and wellbeing, literacy and communication, sustainability and family engagement. This supported shared leadership and increased staff confidence. Leadership opportunities for all staff should continue to be encouraged and identified.

Children play and learn 4 - Good

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

Children had access to a good range of resources which enabled them to make choices and engage independently in play. They moved freely within the environment and benefited from free flow access between indoor and outdoor spaces when available to them. As a result, children were confident in exploring the environment and demonstrated increasing independence. We asked the provider to review children's access to indoor and outdoor free flow provision across the whole day, to ensure this is offered and reflected the service's current conditions of registration. The provider has subsequently submitted a request to the Care Inspectorate to review this condition of registration.

We advised the service that the outdoor sand pit should be securely covered when not in use, particularly overnight, to reduce the risk of contamination and ensure children continue to play safely and hygienically. The provider responded positively and was considering imminent options to take forward.

Children experienced meaningful engagement when adults supported play sensitively. For example, children working in the block area collaborated and used mathematical language such as size, shape and position, supporting early numeracy and communication skills. In the dentist role play area, children practised familiar routines, promoting confidence, oral health awareness and social development. Sensory play in the quieter room enabled children to regulate emotions and remain calm and focused.

Literacy and creativity were clearly demonstrated. During the inspection visit, children recreated the 'Room on the Broom' story through art, sequencing and book making activities, supporting storytelling, memory and expressive language development. During story time, some children showed confident knowledge of books, identifying features such as the spine and the author, which supported early literacy skills and a positive enthusiasm for reading. Staff should continue to ensure that all children are fully engaged during story reading sessions.

When children's interests were purposefully acknowledged, they demonstrated deeper levels of learning. One child maintained prolonged focus while producing a detailed drawing, showing perseverance and developing fine motor skills. Another child expressed a strong interest in aeroplanes and local airports, confidently talking about geography and flight routes. These examples highlighted that children can engage at high levels of concentration, enquiry and thinking when learning is linked to their interests. However, we also identified occasions where staff could have further extended these interests to deepen children's thinking and nurture their curiosity.

Warm and affectionate relationships were evident. Children sought comfort from staff, and staff responded appropriately, which supported emotional security and trust. Positive interactions promoted children's confidence and willingness to engage.

When staff tuned into children's play, they supported learning effectively. For example, a staff member identified a den created by children and re-joined them to continue play, rather than removing it. This respected children's ideas and supported sustained shared thinking.

At times, staff interactions were task focused and inconsistent. Where staff listened actively and involved children in decision making, children's voice and engagement were stronger. More consistent use of observation and thoughtful questioning would further strengthen children's language development and problem solving.

Observations in learning journals clearly captured children's achievements and experiences. Children's successes were recognised verbally, supporting confidence and self esteem. Families were informed of next steps, strengthening partnerships and continuity of learning between home and the setting.

Planning systems ensured coverage of learning areas. However, when planning was more responsive to children's interests, participation and engagement were noticeably higher. Opportunities to build on spontaneous learning, such as children's interest in movement, materials or transportation, would further support depth of learning.

Children are supported to achieve 4 - Good

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

Children were treated with kindness, compassion and respect. Interactions observed were warm, friendly and caring. Staff spoke gently to children, offered reassurance and praise, and responded to children's needs appropriately. As a result, children appeared happy, relaxed and confident within the setting.

Children confidently approached staff, and many were also comfortable engaging with inspectors, offering to show them their environment and asking questions. This demonstrated children's confidence and sense of belonging in the setting. During lunchtime, children showed care and respect for one another, reflecting the positive relationships modelled by staff. Friendships between children were nurtured and supported, contributing to a calm and caring atmosphere.

Children showed minimal signs of distress or conflict for most of the day. By the afternoon, some children appeared tired, particularly those attending longer sessions. Opportunities to rest, relax or self regulate following lunch were limited. Providing calm, cosy spaces to unwind would support children's emotional regulation and sustain wellbeing across extended days.

Care routines, such as toileting, nappy changing and clothing changes, were generally responsive to children's needs. Children had access to toilets when required, and staff responded promptly to personal care needs. Infection prevention and control practices should be strengthened through effective handwashing and nose wiping routines, improved toilet hygiene, and regular cleaning of soft furnishings, to ensure a safe and healthy environment for children. Opportunities to promote independence during these care routines were limited. Strengthening these opportunities would further support children's confidence and self care skills.

There were extended periods of sitting and waiting throughout the day, particularly around transitions and collection times. Reducing these periods would better support children's engagement and wellbeing.

Staff responded sensitively to children's emotions at times, for example offering reassurance or comfort when a child was upset. Inconsistencies in practice meant some children's emotional cues were not always recognised promptly. Greater consistency in observing and responding to behaviour as communication would further enhance children's emotional support.

The environment was secure, with appropriate sign in arrangements for staff and visitors and accurate daily registers. Children felt safe. Several told us they felt secure and that staff knew their likes and dislikes. These positive relationships supported children's confidence and willingness to express themselves.

Personal plans were in place for all children and were reviewed regularly with families. Plans identified children's health, safety and welfare needs, and keyworkers demonstrated knowledge of the children they supported. This helped ensure children's individual needs were generally understood.

Families were warmly welcomed into the service and were encouraged to be involved through stay and play sessions and shared experiences. Staff engaged positively with families during drop off and collection times, supporting trusting relationships.

Parental feedback highlighted strong appreciation for the warmth, care and commitment of staff. Parents described children as happy, settled and enjoying nursery. Families valued outdoor play, communication through learning journals and opportunities to be involved. Areas identified for improvement, such as staff consistency and personalised support, were constructive and reflected families' ongoing engagement with the service.

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

Children should have access to a range of rich, stimulating play resources to support their development. The manager and staff should ensure that areas within the playrooms are developmentally appropriate and resourced to meet the individual needs of children.

This area for improvement was made on 24 March 2023.

Action taken since then

Met. Resources had been developed.

Previous area for improvement 2

The provider and management team should review and improve the deployment of staff to ensure the quality of children's play and learning experiences are improved. This is to ensure all children achieve their potential.

This area for improvement was made on 24 March 2023.

Action taken since then

Met. Staff deployment had been improved.

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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