

# Castlepark Early Years Centre Day Care of Children

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Castlepark  
Irvine  
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**Type of inspection:**  
Unannounced

**Completed on:**  
5 December 2024

**Service provided by:**  
North Ayrshire Council

**Service provider number:**  
SP2003003327

**Service no:**  
CS2003016029

## About the service

Castlepark Early Years Centre provides a daycare of children's service to a maximum of 88 children at any one time as follows:

- No more than 28 children 0 to 3 years only
- No more than 60 children 3 years to those not yet attending Primary School only

At the time of our inspection, 150 children were registered with the service; across the morning and afternoon sessions, 74 children attended the service on the first day of the inspection and 63 on the second day.

The service operates from premises within Castlepark Primary School grounds and is provided by North Ayrshire Council. It is located in a residential area within the town of Irvine, close to local amenities, including shops and bus routes.

## About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 4 December 2024 between 09:05 and 16:30 and 5 December 2024 between 08:45 and 15:55. Three inspectors carried out the inspection.

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 with children using the service
- received 31 completed questionnaires
- spoke with staff and the leadership team
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

## Key messages

- Children were supported to feel valued and respected by staff who knew them well.
- The leadership and staff team were passionate and dedicated to improve children's experience and outcomes.
- Children were confident to lead their own play and make independent choices.
- Daily access to outdoor play supported children's health and wellbeing.
- Staff should continue with their plan to develop the quantity and quality of resources for younger children indoors and for all children outdoors.
- The leadership team should continue to gain invaluable feedback from children, staff and families to support self-evaluation and improvement planning processes.
- Staff should continue to source training relevant to their role and reflect on their learning to promote professional development and improve outcomes for children.

## 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

How good is our care, play and learning?	4 - Good
How good is our setting?	4 - Good
How good is our leadership?	4 - Good
How good is our staff team?	4 - Good

Further details on the particular areas inspected are provided at the end of this report.

## How good is our care, play and learning?

4 - Good

We evaluated different parts of this key question as very good and good, with an overall grade of good. Several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed the areas for improvement.

### Quality indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support

Staff's nurturing and supportive nature was evident through their respectful and warm interactions with the children. They were sensitive to children's ever-changing interests and needs, offering reassurance, comfort, and support. This communicated to children that they mattered while reassuring parents and enhancing their confidence in the service's ability to support their child's emotional wellbeing.

Positive relationships that formed within the service helped children develop friendships with their peers. Parent and carer satisfaction with the care and support their children received was reflected in their feedback. One parent commented, "The service is great. My son loves attending Castlepark Early Years Centre," while another stated, "Great nursery; my child has settled well. I have no worries or concerns".

Parents and carers entered the cloakroom area when dropping off and picking up their children. Staff communicated feedback about their children's day, fostering a sense of partnership. Families had opportunities to participate in stay and play sessions throughout the year and attend settling sessions with their children before they started at the service. These sessions allowed families to meet their child's key person and other staff and learn about the nursery routine. We discussed that having parents in the playrooms during drop-off and pick-up times would strengthen the bond between staff and families, helping to develop secure attachments for children.

Children's privacy and dignity were upheld when they required support with personal care, such as nappy changes or assistance with toileting. These interactions enhanced children's security and confidence, fostering positive relationships with staff.

Personal plans and communication passports for children reflected their preferences and health and wellbeing needs. Families played a central role in this process, ensuring effective information sharing and providing reassurance that each child's individual needs were being addressed. These plans set specific targets and strategies to meet children's needs. We discussed the necessity of dating communication passports upon completion. Regularly monitoring these documents by the leadership team will support consistency and ensure they are completed accurately.

When children required additional support based on their identified needs, staff worked closely with families to determine the best ways to provide that support. This shared approach ensured that appropriate plans were put in place and that relevant external assistance was accessed when necessary, contributing to children reaching their full potential.

During mealtimes, staff supported children by sitting with them, engaging in conversation, and providing assistance tailored to their individual needs. Overall, mealtimes were unhurried and relaxed, creating a sociable experience for children. They had opportunities to develop independence skills during snack time by self-serving and helping to tidy their plates and cutlery afterwards. This fostered a sense of responsibility and promoted their social skills. Encouraging children's independence during lunchtime should

be prioritised to enhance their skills. The leadership team discussed planned improvements for the lunchroom environment to provide a nurturing and homely space during mealtimes, reinforcing the service's commitment to children's comfort and wellbeing.

Medications were stored securely, labelled, and kept out of children's reach. Staff understood the medical needs of children well, and medication was administered safely, supporting their overall health and wellbeing. The head of centre shared the local authority's updated procedures for safe medication administration, which will further strengthen the process and ensure children's safety.

Staff's commitment to safeguarding children was evident in their participation in child protection training throughout the year. They spoke confidently about the setting's policies and procedures, explaining how training had enhanced their knowledge and skills to keep children safe.

### **Quality indicator 1.3: Play and learning**

Children enjoyed playing with friends and on their own while receiving support from staff to express their thoughts and feelings. This approach helped children feel confident and safe communicating their preferences and developing peer relationships.

Staff played a crucial role in nurturing children's learning. They interacted with children at their level, encouraging them to reflect on and discuss their learning by asking questions such as, "What do you want to learn today?" and "What do you want to do tomorrow?" Providing further training on effective questioning techniques for staff working with younger children could enhance their skills and promote deeper thinking during play, reinforcing their importance in children's development.

Children were empowered to choose from various play and learning experiences, enjoying the freedom to play indoors or outdoors during the session. Older children engaged in activities that fostered their language, literacy, and numeracy skills, such as drawing house plans, constructing them with Duplo blocks, and participating in music, story, and rhyme time. Bookbug sessions also allowed families to spend quality time in the nursery, helping children build social skills and enhance their speech and language development. We discussed the value of involving younger children in these experiences.

Children were provided with puddle suits and wellies, ensuring comfort and supporting outdoor play. Staff encouraged children to dress and assisted when necessary, fostering their independence and self-help skills.

The learning environment maintained a careful balance between child-initiated and adult-directed activities, ensuring a comprehensive approach that addressed children's developmental outcomes. This balanced approach supported staff in building on child-initiated activities while extending children's learning opportunities and thinking. For example, when children showed interest in rolling balls indoors, staff facilitated the activity outdoors, where children could roll different-sized balls down the guttering. This experience encouraged problem-solving and kept children engaged for an extended period, fostering excitement and involvement. Staff demonstrated skill in knowing when to intervene and when to allow children to play independently, which helped enhance children's concentration skills.

Staff displayed some understanding of schematic play, which involves children's repeated patterns of behaviour during play, and used this knowledge to extend younger children's thinking. They displayed information about schemas for parents on a wall leading to the playroom, demonstrating their commitment to parental involvement.

Play and sensory materials like cardboard boxes, sand, water, and playdough allowed young children to explore and repeat behaviours while playing. The sensory room was equipped with heuristic play materials, such as natural objects typically found at home rather than conventional toys, to stimulate children's curiosity, senses, and critical thinking. However, children did not use this room during the inspection. We discussed including these materials in the playroom to better meet children's needs and wishes.

Observations of children's play and learning were of good quality and were routinely shared with families to support the partnership between the setting and home. This sharing was done through an online digital app, allowing instant updates and feedback and enhancing communication between staff and families.

Staff used guidance documents such as "Realising the Ambition," "Curriculum for Excellence," and "Pre-Birth to Three" to support their planning for children's learning journeys. Additionally, trackers on the digital app aided in monitoring children's progression and helped staff provide appropriate challenges and support during play experiences, aligning with children's interests. The service should continue using the learning books in playrooms based on play areas to capture children's interests and voices.

## How good is our setting?

4 - Good

We evaluated this key question as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children, and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

### Quality indicator 2.2: Children experience high quality facilities

Children were provided with a welcoming and comfortable setting, furnished to a good standard with ample natural light and ventilation. Informative displays in the entrance area fostered a sense of family engagement.

Children were cared for in designated playrooms that offered plenty of space for play. These playrooms were organised to support children's age and developmental stage. Additionally, each child had a personal space for their belongings, contributing to their sense of security, emotional wellbeing, and inclusion.

Indoors, the environment was thoughtfully structured, and play spaces reflected children's current interests and curiosities. A wide range of resources and materials was available to support older children. Staff remained committed to developing the quantity and quality of resources for younger children, enhancing their experiences and outcomes, and providing more soft furnishings in both playrooms for relaxation. This ongoing commitment to improvement supported the service's dedication to quality.

Outdoors, children engaged in cause-and-effect play opportunities, such as jumping and splashing in puddles or using gutters and objects to solve problems and predict outcomes. This encouraged children to work together and develop their social communication and thinking skills. Staff should continue enhancing the outdoor areas to ensure children actively experience play and learning challenges tailored to their needs and interests.

Children's safety was ensured through comprehensive measures, such as attendance records, secure entry to the setting, and risk assessments. The leadership team effectively managed access to the entrance, preventing unauthorised individuals from entering or children from leaving, which contributed to a secure environment. Staff communicated with one another and updated attendance registers throughout the day, ensuring that children's whereabouts were documented during their sessions. This provided families with a reassuring sense of security. The head of the centre's commitment to regularly assessing the security of the setting and seeking advice from health and safety experts further reinforced confidence in the safety measures in place.

Children were prompted to wash their hands at key times of the day, reflecting the setting's dedication to infection prevention and control. Staff were also mindful of the need for regular handwashing and maintaining a clean environment to promote children's health. There were some initial concerns regarding the sinks in the toilet area used by older children. The head of the centre was aware of these issues and reported them to the local authority before the inspection. We received information after the inspection indicating that these handwashing facilities were scheduled for immediate replacement. These improvements will help minimise any potential risk of infection.

Accident and incident forms were completed and shared with families promptly, and appropriate first aid was administered when needed. These forms were regularly audited. We discussed possible improvements in the auditing process to help identify common or recurring themes and the necessary actions to maintain children's wellbeing and safety.

## How good is our leadership?

4 - Good

We evaluated this key question as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children, and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

### Quality indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well

Recent staff changes, including within the leadership team, have occurred due to adjustments in the service delivery model at North Ayrshire Council and staff absences. Despite these changes, both the leadership and staff were passionate and dedicated to improving children's experiences and outcomes. They expressed their confidence in the service, stating, "We know families very well, and our relationship with them is strong. We are nurturing and caring, which is evident in our communication with parents and carers". This commitment was further strengthened by parenting courses such as Incredible Years and Triple P, which help parents develop their existing skills and promote positive outcomes for children.

Children, families, and staff recently contributed to updating the service's vision, values, and aims through an online survey. The head of centre shared the results, fostering a shared understanding of core values that will guide future improvements. This process ensures that all voices are heard, making everyone involved in the service feel valued and included.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were in the early stages and focused on developing inclusion, children's voices, and enhancing staff skills. The head of centre has outlined plans for staff development and programmes to support children's growth, demonstrating a strong commitment to service quality. This dedication, especially during recent changes, reflects the leadership team's capability and should reassure families about the quality of care provided.

During the inspection, the head of centre and the leadership team actively engaged with children and staff in the playrooms. This hands-on approach showed their commitment and was a role model for effective practice. Staff feedback indicated that the leadership team recognised and supported their wellbeing needs.

## How good is our staff team?

4 - Good

We evaluated this key question as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children, and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

### Quality indicator 4.3: Staff deployment

There was a mix of staff skills and knowledge in the setting. New staff were inducted using the National Induction Resource, which encouraged them to reflect on their experiences and expectations. Positive mentoring helped new staff feel confident and comfortable in their roles.

Staff members and senior leaders worked effectively to build positive relationships and develop as a team. As a result, the leadership team supported, valued, and respected the staff. Staff understood their roles and were eager to develop leadership skills and take responsibility for specific aspects of service, such as enhancing the outdoor learning environment and lunchroom and leading sessions for Bookbug, music, stories, and rhymes.

Staff were attentive to children's different personalities and demonstrated respect in their interactions. They used gentle tones, positive facial expressions, and visual aids and offered consistent praise and encouragement. One parent stated, "My child's learning is improving so much," while another remarked, "The staff are lovely, friendly, and listen to your opinions and concerns. My child is always happy to go there and rushes to the door to be first in when he starts the day".

The relaxed pace of interactions helped build children's trust and contributed to their overall enjoyment. Staff moved fluidly throughout the setting in response to children's requests and preferred play areas. They positioned themselves strategically for maximum supervision, both indoors and outdoors. Effective team communication ensured continuity of care, even when tasks took staff away from their areas of responsibility, as they confidently asked for cover when needed. This approach kept staff continually available to children and enhanced their safety.

The leadership team organised staff breaks thoughtfully to maintain continuity of care throughout the day and ensure smooth transitions for children, particularly during busy times such as lunch, nappy changes, and the arrival and collection of children. As a result, children could enjoy free flow play and receive a high level of care.

A training matrix was in place to enhance staff knowledge and skills. Staff should continue to reflect on their learning to promote professional development and improve outcomes for children. This will ensure that children can learn and develop at a pace that suits them.



## 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

How good is our care, play and learning?	4 - Good
1.1 Nurturing care and support	5 - Very Good
1.3 Play and learning	4 - Good
How good is our setting?	4 - Good
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	4 - Good
How good is our leadership?	4 - Good
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	4 - Good
How good is our staff team?	4 - Good
4.3 Staff deployment	4 - Good

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