

St. Mary's Primary Nursery Centre Day Care of Children

Skye Walk
Lanark
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Telephone: 01555 678 013

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
25 June 2025

Service provided by:
South Lanarkshire Council

Service provider number:
SP2003003481

Service no:
CS2003015361

About the service

St. Mary's Primary Nursery Centre is a daycare of children service provided by South Lanarkshire Council and located in the town of Lanark, South Lanarkshire. It is close to public transport links and local amenities. The service is registered to provide care to a maximum of 57 children aged from two years to those not yet attending primary school.

The service is provided from the nursery wing of St. Mary's Primary School. Playrooms have direct access to a secure outdoor play area, which children can independently access throughout the day. Children also make use of the extensive school grounds, including adjacent woodland area to support their outdoor play and learning.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Monday 23 June 2025 between 14:30 and 16:30. We continued the inspection on Tuesday 24 June 2025, between 08:00 and 16:45. We gave inspection feedback to the management team on Wednesday 25 June 2025, when a representative from the service provider was also present. 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 registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered throughout the inspection year.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with some of the children and reviewed survey responses from 11 parents
- spoke with the service manager, depute and six staff. We also reviewed survey responses from seven staff
- observed practice and staff interactions with children
- reviewed documents.

As part of this inspection, we 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
- 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, caring and nurturing interactions from staff, which contributed to them feeling safe, secure and loved.
- Parents had developed positive relationships with staff, as they had access to the playroom and shared regular updates on children's care, learning and progress.
- Children had fun during their play and could choose from toys and resources to support their learning, both in indoors and outside.
- Management and staff teams worked very well together, with a collaborative approach to the continued improvement of the service.
- The service was appropriately staffed to meet the needs of children. Staff were kind and respectful, offering help to each other when required.

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?	5 - Very Good
How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good

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

How good is our care, play and learning?

5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

Quality Indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support.

Children were very settled within the setting. They were offered cuddles, praise and reassurance by staff, who supported them to share their feelings. For example, using the feelings monster book, puppets and 'emotions' capes, which helped children talk about and label their emotions. The positive attachments children had formed with staff contributed to children feeling valued and loved.

Families were welcomed by staff at the beginning and end of each session, which helped them build relationships with the team that would be looking after their children. Staff worked closely with parents as they gathered information about children for the different elements of their personal plans, deciding how best to support children's individual needs and development. Staff also worked very effectively with external professionals to support children, sharing strategies that would enable children to achieve their full potential.

Parents all strongly agreed that they were fully involved in developing and reviewing their child's personal plan. Their comments included, "Goal setting is always done jointly and really focuses on ensuring they are meeting both educational and social goals" and "Staff regularly check in with us on updates for (our child) and want to hear about his achievements from home. They take on board things that have worked at home so that they can incorporate this into his day at nursery. There is always a friendly smile and chat at pick-up and drop off times and we can really tell they genuinely care about (our child)".

Child centred approaches to children's transitions were a particular strength of the setting. It included home visits before the child joined the setting, then moved between playrooms and later onto primary school. At these times information was shared with families to ensure continuity and progression in their child's care. These sensitively planned and flexible approaches contributed to building children's resilience, enabling them to feel safe and secure with any changes.

Familiar routines contributed to children's emotional security and wellbeing. For example, staff were responsive to children's individual sleep and rest cues. They recognised when children were tired and provided comfort and quiet spaces for them to relax. Children enjoyed a range of meal provision, which provided opportunities to develop their independence and life skills as they prepared some of the food and self-served. Older children decided when to eat their snack so that it did not interrupt their play. This meant children were able to eat when they were hungry and enjoy snack at a pace that was right for them. Management and staff had adapted how lunch was served in the three to five playroom and should continue to evaluate children's experience of this. For example, their plans to move lunch to a quieter area will minimise distractions and provide richer opportunities for staff to connect with children and support healthy eating habits.

Children's medication was mainly stored according to good practice although we advised that emergency medication should be more readily accessible. This will support children's health and safety. Management should refer to Care Inspectorate updated guidance 'Management of medication in daycare of children and childminding settings' (December 2024).

Children's welfare and wellbeing was supported as staff were familiar with their safeguarding role and responsibilities concerning the identification of signs of abuse. They were keeping up to date with current child protection guidance, through their participation in annual training.

Quality Indicator 1.3: Play and learning.

Children were busily engaged in play of their choice, developing their imagination and problem solving skills. They had the freedom to move between the playrooms and secure outdoor area. Children confidently selected resources to support their learning, frequently transporting these between areas. There was a good balance of natural and manufactured resources. For example, real life objects, dressing up clothes, construction toys, books, information technology and sensory materials, including sand, mud, water and playdough. Opportunities for play and learning were enhanced through experiences in the school and wider community, such as forest school sessions and participation in local festivals. This contributed to children's sense of belonging and interest in their wider world.

Throughout the setting, displays reminded staff about the theories and good practice guidance that underpinned their work with children. This included Froebel approaches, block play, forest and other outdoor activities that supported children to develop and achieve a range of life skills through engaging in high-quality experiences. Froebel was a philosopher who emphasized the importance of allowing children to explore, discover, and learn through play. We observed that staff used well-timed open-ended questioning to further extend and challenge children's thinking and learning.

Children were building knowledge and skills related to literacy and numeracy in a fun way, and naturally through their play. They chose books and listened to stories, sang songs and used mark making tools. We listened as staff used snack time to promote children's use of mathematical language. One child helping to serve toast had noticed it was a square and staff asked what it would be once halved. The child's response was, "It'll be a triangle because there's three points - or maybe a shark!" Floor books were used by staff to encourage children to talk about what they had been learning and what they would like to explore next. Use of print in different contexts encouraged children to make connections with the written word. The sample of floor books we looked at included annotated photographs, mind maps and examples of children's mark making, they demonstrated how staff included and respected children's voice within their planning.

Children's next steps and progress were recorded on an online learning platform, which was regularly shared with children and their families. Parents were encouraged to upload children's significant events to their online learning journals so that the setting could share their interests and achievements. They were regularly invited into the setting for stay and play, progress meetings or to share special events such as the children's 'graduation' ceremony. This ensured parents felt valued as active participants in their child's learning. One parent commented in our survey, "The stay and play events are lovely and I have always felt very welcome within the nursery".

How good is our setting?

5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

Quality Indicator 2.2: Children experience high quality facilities.

The nursery was based within a purpose-built school, which had a secure entry system with additional fob access for playroom doors ensuring children's safety. Playrooms were bright and well furnished with plenty of natural light and comfortable areas for children to rest and relax. Resources were stored in a way that was easily accessible to children, both indoors and outdoors, as they explored their play intentions. Displays included children's photographs, artwork and child-friendly picture reminders about different routines and activities. This created a warm and friendly atmosphere, where children felt valued.

Staff had organised spaces that supported children to socialise, play in small groups or alone if they preferred. This included a calm sensory room where children could work on a one-to-one basis with staff, or with a small group, to escape the bustle of the playrooms. This positively impacted on children's ability to regulate their emotions and build social skills.

Staff valued the positive impact of outdoor play and promoted it in all weathers. In addition to the nursery's own outdoor area, children also accessed the school grounds, adjacent woodland and other facilities in the local community. Children were learning to recognise what precautions they should take to protect themselves against inclement weather, as staff supported children to choose whether they needed sun hats, rain suits or welly boots in preparation to go outside. The setting provided spare outdoor wear within a comfortable cloakroom area that promoted children's independence in getting dressed.

Parents generally appreciated the breadth of play experiences offered to their children, particularly outdoors. Comments included, "Forest school. Trips out to the local adult day centre and local community including trips to Lanark loch. Constant outdoor play!" and "Initiatives such as forest school have been wonderful".

There were clear processes in place to keep children safe. Risk assessments were regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that any potential harm was minimised. Where appropriate, children were involved in this process. Some children told us about their 'rules' in the forest, such as, "We don't eat anything off the ground". Staff supervised children closely and responsively assessed risky play. Staff were making very good use of SIMOA resources to support children to assess and manage their own limits safely. 'Keeping Children Safe - Look, Think, Act' (SIMOA) is the Care Inspectorate's safety campaign, which aims to keep children safe by raising awareness of how, and why, they could leave a childcare setting without a responsible adult.

The environment was clean and well-maintained and staff had a good knowledge of infection prevention and control measures. For example, children were reminded to wash their hands at key times and were supported in this task. This minimised the risk of cross infection and ensured that children experienced a hygienic and safe environment. During our inspection we highlighted where changes to practice could further minimise the risk of cross infection, such as the timing of emptying the snack area bin and consideration to storage of children's packed lunches. We were confident that these issues would be addressed as part of the evaluation children's mealtime experience.

How good is our leadership?**5 - Very Good**

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

Quality Indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well.

The setting was provided by the local authority and had a clear management structure with the school head teacher as the registered manager, and the depute taking responsibility for the day to day running of the setting. There was strong leadership arrangements with each manager having designated roles within quality assurance, including implementation of the monitoring calendar. This ensured there was high-quality care and learning tailored to children and families' needs and choices.

The management team valued staff and was committed to ensuring they were motivated and supported to carry out their roles effectively. Respectful communication was encouraged throughout the staff team, which ensured consistent approaches and a shared understanding of the priorities of the service. For example, everyone was able to participate in weekly staff meetings as there were two sittings and minutes taken for those unable to attend, to read. Meetings were used to involve staff in self-evaluation of the setting and reflect on what was working well. As a result, everyone was working together to ensure all children reached their full potential.

Staff participated in annual appraisals with half year reviews, and had an open door to support from their line manager, which meant they were able to discuss their practice and professional development as well as personal issues. These processes had helped identify leadership roles for staff that reflected their individual interests and strengths. Staff mainly strongly agreed that their wellbeing needs were recognised and supported by leaders. Their comments included, "I always feel support from my manager, they are compassionate and empathic to the staff needs" and "The management team within my setting are approachable and always there to talk to. We have PDRS and regular meetings".

Management and staff worked closely with families and were committed to involving them in the life of the setting. Among the aims of the whole school community was an ethos of partnership with parents, 'To create a friendly environment where parents and other carers feel welcome, confident and at ease'. To achieve this, methods of communication included email, interactive applications, social media and daily chats. This contributed to parents and carers feeling respected, and that their perspective was valued. In our survey, seven parents strongly agreed and the other four agreed, that their family was involved in a meaningful way to help develop the service. Their comments included, "I feel special thanks should go to the management team - the whole ethos of the nursery comes from Heidi and their nurturing personality".

Management and staff engaged well during the inspection process, providing additional evidence and taking on advice and support, which demonstrated their commitment to improvement.

How good is our staff team?**5 - Very Good**

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

Quality Indicator 4.3: Staff deployment.

The management team made very good use of the different knowledge, skills and experience within the team, to ensure children enjoyed responsive care, play and learning experiences. Following a period of

instability in the staff team, the refreshed focus on staff wellbeing and commitment to a range of professional activities, including training from external agencies, meant staff felt valued, respected, and promoted positive staff attendance. New staff shared their experience of induction with us, which they believed to be thorough and made them feel welcome and immediately part of the team. They were supported by a mentor who familiarised them with the expectations of their new role and responsibilities.

Staff drew on their professional development to deepen their understanding of play pedagogy, a service priority. Individual staff cascaded their training to colleagues within team meetings or through modelling practice. They told us about the positive impact their training had on the quality of experiences for children, securing their progress, for example, "definitely forest schools! Children are developing trust and independence, becoming better at getting dressed. They're thriving on independence!"

Children's needs were met as there were appropriate staff ratios. The management of staff shifts and breaks ensured continuity in children's care and that staff caring for them were rested, energised and motivated to engage with children. For example, when needed, support staff from the wider school were able to provide assistance. They were known to children and families as they were part of the school community. Occasionally, staff cover was brought in from other early learning and childcare settings, but management ensured that there was consistency in choice of these. As a result, there were always familiar adults for children, who also knew the service expectations for high standards in provision.

Children benefitted from a staff team who worked well together and had created a welcoming, inclusive environment. The team were respectful of children's rights, they listened carefully to their ideas, which contributed to children feeling included. Parents and staff believed that relationships were a strength of the team, summarised by the parent comment, "Strong relationships - staff take the time to build a relationship with parents and kids. Clear and regular communication."

Most parents stated that there were always enough staff in the service to meet their child's needs, while three confirmed this was often the case. One parent explained, "There are always extra staff available in the office should a staff member have to leave the room to speak to a parent. I have seen them first hand ensure an extra staff member enters the room before they leave".

We acknowledged the very good practice of monitoring the number of children and adults in different areas. Staff rotated round different areas of the playrooms on a fortnightly basis, but they also moved naturally in response to where children wished to play or where children needed more closer supervision to support their safety. One member of staff had responsibility for tally of numbers throughout each day. This ensured staff deployment supported children's wellbeing and safety. At the end of the second day of inspection, children from three to five playroom were playing in the securely enclosed school grounds with staff, and we noted that this was a significant distance from the tally board. Management and staff agreed that it would be beneficial to take a register or other portable system with them at these times so that children could always be quickly accounted for.

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

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

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