

Noss Early Learning and Childcare Day Care of Children

Noss Primary School
Ackergill Street
Wick
KW1 4DT

Telephone: 01955 609 990

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
28 May 2025

Service provided by:
Highland Council

Service provider number:
SP2003001693

Service no:
CS2003013514

About the service

Noss Early Learning and Childcare is registered to provide a service to a maximum of 80 children, aged from three years to those not yet attending primary school. The service is operated by The Highland Council. The head teacher is the registered manager of the service. The service operates term time only.

Noss Early Learning and Childcare is located within Noss Primary School in Wick, Caithness. It has its own separate entrance. The premises consists of three playrooms, with direct access to an enclosed outdoor play area. Children also have access to an additional outdoor area within the school. At the time of the inspection there were 76 children in attendance.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 27 and 28 May 2025. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate.

To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included, previous inspection findings, registration information, 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
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents
- reviewed online feedback from 19 parents and carers.

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

- Overall, children were nurtured and supported throughout their experiences.
- Children's individual wellbeing did not consistently benefit from the effective use of personal planning.
- Children experienced positive snack and lunchtime experiences.
- Parents spoke positively about the staff team.
- Play resources did not consistently inspire and engage children in meaningful play experiences.
- Ineffective quality assurance processes meant children did not receive high quality care, support and learning experiences.
- There were significant gaps in knowledge around safeguarding processes and procedures, which had potential to place children at significant risk of harm.
- Staff worked well as a team, promoting a positive ethos.
- The number of staff working in the service was insufficient, compromising the quality of care and support children received.

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?	3 - Adequate
How good is our setting?	3 - Adequate
How good is our leadership?	2 - Weak
How good is our staff team?	3 - Adequate

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

How good is our care, play and learning?

3 - Adequate

We made an evaluation of adequate for this quality indicator, where strengths only just outweighed weaknesses.

Quality Indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support

Overall, children were nurtured and supported throughout their experiences. They benefitted from warm, caring relationships from staff. They offered comfort, cuddles and caring interactions when needed. This provided children with reassurance and supported their wellbeing, contributing to them feeling valued and respected. However, due to competing demands placed on staff, they did not always pick up on children's cues for support and interaction. As a result, children did not always receive the right support at the right time. Parents spoke positively of the staff team. Comments included:

"My child speaks very highly of staff in the setting"

"All staff are very friendly and helpful"

"I have a great relationship with the staff at Noss"

"I feel very confident leaving my child in the care of all staff, they are very trustworthy and caring to all children".

The majority of staff communicated with children at their level in a quiet and sensitive way. These supportive interactions developed positive relationships between staff and children. However, we also saw some interactions that did not positively support children's wellbeing. For example, at times some staff used loud voices, shouting across the playroom to get children's attention and used a stern tone of voice when speaking to some children.

Children's individual wellbeing did not consistently benefit from the effective use of personal planning. Some staff could tell us the strategies they used to support some children. However, personal planning for most children was inconsistent and resulted in poorer outcomes. For some children there were no clear strategies of support in place to enable them to reach their full potential. This meant continuity and consistency in care was compromised. We signposted the service to a 'Guide for Providers on Personal Planning' to support them with making improvements. **(See Area for improvement 1)**

Approaches to Primary 1 transition promoted children's security and wellbeing. This was supported through effective transition arrangements. Additional support was put in place for children who required it. This contributed to the development of supportive relationships to ensure children felt safe and secure during their time of transition.

Children experienced positive snack and lunchtime experiences. Children were encouraged to participate in these daily routines which provided them with some opportunities to be responsible and independent. For example, in some rooms children took on the role of snack helper and prepared the food. Children could choose when they had snack and staff sat with them at snack and lunchtime which made it a positive sociable experience for children and provided opportunities for emerging language skills to be developed. The service should now consider how they can further enhance opportunities to promote independence at lunchtime, for example, self-serving their own food.

Establishing good working relationship with parents was important to the staff team. The service provided opportunities for families to stay and play and there was daily communication at drop of and pick up times as well as online updates. The quality of handovers on a daily basis were variable. Some staff welcomed parents into the playroom, which allowed for effective information sharing. However, this was not consistent across all playrooms. As a result, the quality of information being shared with some parents was limited.

Quality Indicator 1.3: Play and learning

Overall, most children were engaged and motivated in their play and were having fun with other children. They participated in some play experiences which stimulated their learning and creativity. However, on occasions some children were disengaged and would have benefitted from more adult interaction to enable them to feel included in their play experiences. Children told us they enjoyed playing outside, doing arts and crafts and planting in the garden.

Play resources did not consistently inspire and engage children in meaningful play experiences. There were some loose parts and open-ended objects within the indoor playrooms to support curiosity and enquiry. However, they were not always well presented in an inviting way to capture children's interests. This minimised children's engagement levels. **(See Area for improvement 2)**

Play experiences offered children some opportunities to develop and extend literacy and numeracy skills. The indoor playrooms had some materials to support the development of pre-writing skills and staff shared books with children, engaging them with fun interactions, naming items in pictures and modelling and repeating words. Some staff also used songs to reinforce counting and number skills for children. However, opportunities to extend and develop children's literacy and numeracy experiences were not always noticed and acted on by staff. Staff were often task focussed, resulting in missed opportunities to extend children's learning and widen their skills through play.

Planning approaches aimed to be child centred and responsive to the children's interests. Children were able to follow their own curiosities within the play resources available to them. Children's words, pictures and ideas were captured within floor books which demonstrated their involvement in the planning process.

As part of their ongoing improvement work the service had identified the need to support and develop staff confidence in observation, planning and assessment approaches to ensure all children are supported and challenged at an appropriate level. This was in the early stages of development and the service should continue to develop this area of practice. **(See Area for improvement 2)**

Areas for improvement

1. To support children's wellbeing, the provider should ensure personal planning approaches improve so that they set out clearly how children's care and support needs will be met.

This would include but not be limited to:

- a) ensuring personal plans reflect children's current needs
- b) ensuring strategies of support for individual children are developed and implemented by staff
- c) ensuring all staff are knowledgeable and understand the information within the personal plans and use this to effectively meet each child's needs.

This is to ensure care and support is consistent with the Care Inspectorate document 'Guide for providers on personal planning'.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'My personal plan (sometimes referred to as a care plan) is right for me because it sets out how my needs will be met, as well as my wishes and choices' (HSCS 1.15).

2. To effectively deliver high quality play and learning experiences, the manager should support staff to develop their skills.

This should include but is not limited to developing skills in:

- a) completing meaningful high-quality observations
- b) reporting and recording children's progress
- c) using best practice guidance to support high quality play experiences
- d) identifying stimulating resources to support play and learning opportunities.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS), which state: 'I experience high quality care and support based on relevant evidence, guidance and best practice' (HSCS 4.11).

How good is our setting?

3 - Adequate

We made an evaluation of adequate for this quality indicator, where strengths only just outweighed weaknesses.

Quality Indicator 2.2: Children experience high quality facilities

Play spaces benefitted from plenty of natural light and the environment was clean and tidy. However, there was limited attention to detail such as, homely touches. This created a play space that lacked warmth and created a functional feel. There were limited cosy areas across playrooms for children to comfortably rest and relax. The service should review the indoor environment for children to promote a more welcoming environment, with more cosy areas and homely touches. In addition to this playrooms had not always been thoughtfully arranged and carefully considered. The layout of one playroom limited children's opportunities to explore the indoor environment freely. For example, there were a number of tables which negatively impacted on children's play space and experiences. We sign posted the service to best practice guidance 'Space to Grow and Thrive' to assist with developing this area of practice. **(See Area for improvement 1)**

Overall, the resources and experiences provided did not effectively support children's curiosity and build on their interests. Some open-ended real-life resources such as, pots, pans and telephones were available to children, encouraging their imagination and problem-solving skills. However, greater use of provocations and open-ended materials should be considered to encourage children's curiosity and creativity. While some core materials and toys such as, paint, sand, playdough and building blocks were available, further work was needed to support children to have consistently motivating play experiences. Staff were aware of this and told us, "We desperately need more funding to improve our resources" another staff member commented, "we need better resources that are aimed at all ages and stages of the children that attend". **(See Area for improvement 1)**

Children had daily access to outdoor play. They used the outdoor spaces with confidence and experienced enjoyment, challenge and fun. Areas to climb, run and balance outdoors provided opportunities for children to develop their gross motor skills. Children enjoyed swinging on a rope swing in the garden, which encouraged them to push their own boundaries and assess and manage risk.

Staff were mindful of where children were at all times. They regularly counted the number of children in each area and told other staff if they were taking children to another area of the setting. Consistent use of walkie talkies enhanced staff communication and allowed them to stay in constant contact across different areas of the setting such as, the indoor and outdoor spaces. This contributed to keeping children safe.

Areas for improvement

1. To enable all children to be cared for in an appropriate environment that meets their needs and supports them to reach their full potential, the manager and staff should review the environment.

This should include but is not limited to, providing children with an environment that is welcoming, comfortable and homely and appropriately resourced so that they are provided with sufficient opportunities to engage meaningfully with their play and learning environments.

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

'If I experience care and support in a group, I experience a homely environment and can use a comfortable area with soft furnishings to relax' (HSCS 5.6); and

'As a child, my social and physical skills, confidence, self-esteem and creativity are developed through a balance of organised and freely chosen extended play, including using open ended and natural materials' (HSCS 1.31).

How good is our leadership?

2 - Weak

We made an evaluation of weak for this key question. Whilst we identified some strengths, these were compromised by significant weaknesses. The weaknesses, either individually or when added together, substantially affect children's experiences.

Quality Indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well

Children and families had some opportunities to voice their opinions and ideas, creating an inclusive and supportive environment. For example, children had been asked for the views in relation to improving the outdoor environment. This contributed to children having a voice around the design of the setting. All parents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'My child and I are involved in a meaningful way to help develop the service'. Parents were given opportunities to be involved in service developments through parent consultations and stay and play sessions, supporting them to be involved in shaping their children's play and learning experiences.

Staff were complimentary of the leadership team and spoke positively about the support they received. This encouraged them to feel valued and included in the service. Support and supervision systems were in place, providing opportunities for staff to meet with the leadership team to discuss their personal targets. However, they were infrequent and not yet consistently enabling staff to reflect on practice and make improvements to their practice.

Ineffective quality assurance processes meant children did not receive high quality care, support and learning experiences. Robust systems to monitor and maintain standards within the service were not in place. Children's outcomes were poorer than our previous inspection in February 2024 and identified areas for development had not been followed up. For example, no improvements had been made to the environment, personal planning and interactions were still inconsistent. Gaps in staff deployment had not been addressed by the provider, resulting in an insufficient number of staff working in the service. This meant children's needs were not met at the right time and led to poorer outcomes overall. As a result of this inspection, we have made three requirements and three areas for improvement. The provider must work on the priorities identified and ensure the pace of change is effectively managed to secure positive outcomes for children and their families. **(See Requirement 1)**

Self-evaluation processes were not firmly embedded in practice. There were limited opportunities for staff to come together and reflect on practice. This hindered the ability to support continuous improvement in the service. We asked the leadership team to review and increase opportunities for staff to come together to reflect on practice and improvement priorities.

There were significant gaps in knowledge around safeguarding processes and procedures. As a result, there was potential for children to be placed at risk. The staff and leadership team had not consistently followed their safeguarding procedures. Some concerns raised in chronologies had not been followed up and referrals were not made to the lead agency. We asked the service to undertake an audit of all chronologies and provide us with details of their findings, including any actions taken. Following this we prompted them to take appropriate action to address wellbeing concerns. **(See Requirement 2)**

Requirements

1. By 31 October 2025, the provider must ensure improved outcomes for children by implementing effective systems of quality assurance.

To do this the provider must at a minimum, ensure:

- a) the leadership team effectively monitors the work of each member of staff and the service as a whole
- b) clear and effective plans are in place for maintaining and improving the service
- c) effective audits of chronologies are in place.

This is to comply with Regulation 3 Principles and Regulation 15 (a) and (b) Staffing of The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/210).

This is 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).

2. By 19 August 2025, the provider must ensure that children are safe and protected and their wellbeing needs are met.

To do this, the provider must, as a minimum ensure:

- a) all staff and child protection officers are knowledgeable and competent in relation to child protection procedures and implement these appropriately
- b) chronologies are used effectively to identify and support children's wellbeing and safeguarding.

This is in order to comply with the Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulation 2011 (SSI 2011/210) 4(1)(a) - Requirements to make proper provision for the health and welfare of service users.

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

'I am protected from harm, neglect, abuse, bullying and exploitation by people who have a clear understanding of their responsibilities' (HSCS 3.20).

How good is our staff team?

3 - Adequate

We made an evaluation of adequate for this quality indicator, where strengths only just outweighed weaknesses.

Quality Indicator 4.3: Staff deployment

Overall children benefitted from a caring and nurturing staff team. Staff were enthusiastic and committed to providing a positive experience for the children in their care. Most staff were warm and friendly in their approach and demonstrated positive team working, which promoted a happy and secure environment for children. Overall, they modelled positive social interactions, both verbal and nonverbal. However, due to competing demands placed on them they could not always offer the level of support and interaction they wanted to. This did not ensure high quality outcomes and experiences for children. Staff told us, "I feel that this is a stress for staff not having enough staff across the day to meet the individual needs of each child" and "It's a real pressure on staff feeling they can't meet every child's needs. The staff really try their hardest every day and give all the children the best care they can provide".

Although the minimum adult to child ratio was met, the deployment and number of staff working in the service was insufficient. The approach to staffing was not outcome focussed and did not take into account, the complexity of individual children's needs and the layout of the building. As a result, the quality of children's experiences were compromised and their wishes and choices were not always acknowledged. For example, play and learning experiences were not always being maximised to ensure children's individual development needs were supported. We also saw missed opportunities for extending play and learning to support children's curiosity and enquiry. **(See Requirement 1)**

Staff placed themselves thoughtfully during busier times such as, snack and lunchtime to ensure children's individual needs were well-considered. There was good communication between staff and they worked well together. They communicated well with one another when a task took them away from their responsibilities. For example, when they had to support children with personal care and accessing toilet facilities. A number of staff highlighted positive team working as a key strength of the service. They told us, "I feel we work really well and give our very best in our everyday practice as a team we support each other and work very well in all environments" and "the team have a great bond and support each other throughout each day".

Requirements

1. By 19 August 2025, the provider must ensure children are safe and receive high quality experiences at all times.

To do this, the provider must, at a minimum: ensure that at all times suitably qualified and competent staff are working in the nursery in such numbers as are appropriate for the health, welfare and safety of children.

This is in order to comply with section 7(1)(a) of the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS), which state that: 'My needs are met by the right number of people' (HSCS 3.15).

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?	3 - Adequate
1.1 Nurturing care and support	3 - Adequate
1.3 Play and learning	3 - Adequate
How good is our setting?	3 - Adequate
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	3 - Adequate
How good is our leadership?	2 - Weak
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	2 - Weak
How good is our staff team?	3 - Adequate
4.3 Staff deployment	3 - Adequate

To find out more

This inspection report is published by the Care Inspectorate. You can download this report and others from our website.

Care services in Scotland cannot operate unless they are registered with the Care Inspectorate. We inspect, award grades and help services to improve. We also investigate complaints about care services and can take action when things aren't good enough.

Please get in touch with us if you would like more information or have any concerns about a care service.

You can also read more about our work online at www.careinspectorate.com

Contact us

Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

enquiries@careinspectorate.com

0345 600 9527

Find us on Facebook

Twitter: @careinspect

Other languages and formats

This report is available in other languages and formats on request.

Tha am foillseachadh seo ri fhaighinn ann an cruthannan is cànan eile ma nithear iartras.

অনুরোধসাপেক্ষে এই প্রকাশনাটি অন্য ফরম্যাট এবং অন্যান্য ভাষায় পাওয়া যায়।

یہ اشاعت درخواست کرنے پر دیگر شکلوں اور دیگر زبانوں میں فراہم کی جاسکتی ہے۔

ਬੇਨਤੀ 'ਤੇ ਇਹ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਨ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਹੋਰਨਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਉਪਲਬਧ ਹੈ।

هذه الوثيقة متوفرة بلغات ونماذج أخرى عند الطلب

本出版品有其他格式和其他語言備索。

Na życzenie niniejsza publikacja dostępna jest także w innych formatach oraz językach.