

James Hamilton Early Childhood Centre

Day Care of Children

William McIlvanney Campus
Sutherland Drive
New Farm Loch
Kilmarnock
KA3 7DF

Telephone: 01563 558 508

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
13 August 2025

Service provided by:
East Ayrshire Council

Service provider number:
SP2003000142

Service no:
CS2003016961

About the service

James Hamilton Early Childhood Centre is a daycare service for children situated in Kilmarnock. The service is registered to provide care to a maximum of 82 children not yet attending primary school at any one time. No more than 10 are aged two to under three, and no more than 72 are aged three to those not yet attending primary school. At the time of the inspection, 48 children were registered with the service, and 25 children attended on day one, while 18 children attended on day two.

The service has an outdoor play area. Children were able to move freely between indoors and a secure outdoor area. The centre is within walking distance of local amenities.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection carried out by two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate. It took place on 12 and 13 August 2025. The inspector attended the service between 10:00 and 18:00 hours on 12 August and from 09:00 to 15:30 hours on 13 August.

To prepare for the inspection, we reviewed information about the service. This included registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- observed practice and daily life
- spoke with children using the service
- reviewed documents
- spoke with the manager and staff
- received eight completed questionnaires from parents/carers to gather their views and feedback.

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.

Key messages

- Children received outstandingly high care and support from nurturing and compassionate staff.
- Children were happy and engaged in leading their own play, enhancing their understanding of the world around them.
- Exceptionally strong leadership ensured that children received the highest quality of care.
- Sector leading practice in James Hamilton promoted warm, caring, nurturing staff who understood children's needs well.
- Staff built strong relationships with families, which helped children feel happy and supported.
- Children explored new ideas, made progress, and had fun with the help of staff who listened to them.

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?	6 - Excellent
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 evaluated different parts of this key question as very good and excellent, with an overall grade of very good. Significant strengths in aspects of care provided were sector leading, with outstandingly high outcomes for children.

Quality indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support.

Children received exceptional care and support from highly motivated staff who knew them very well. This was based on developing strong, supportive relationships with their entire family. For example, secure partnerships with families were built before children started nursery through a detailed plan and an embedded approach to support each child. This fostered valuable and meaningful involvement from parents in planning for children's care and helped overcome barriers to their learning and development. This promoted strong relationships and extremely informative communication, helping children feel loved and secure.

Parents felt highly respected and included in the service. They expressed extreme gratitude and shared individual stories about how staff had supported them through significant life events that had impacted them and their child. This included providing support tailored to their individual needs and strengths, as well as supporting family wellbeing and connections that mattered to the child. One parent commented, "All the staff are great with my child and our family. I know my child is well loved and cared for in the centre." Another parent said, "My child is excited to see staff and talks regularly about them at home." As a result, children's emotional wellbeing was fully nurtured, giving families a sense of reassurance and confidence in the quality of the service provided.

The service played a pivotal role in developing a community where children and families felt valued and supported. One example of this was ensuring children and families had access to the 'fun with food' programme. This provided families with support to prepare nutritious meals with links to dietetics and speech and language therapists. A language-rich environment, where children talked, listened, read, and shared ideas, helped them build vocabulary, understand others, express themselves, gain confidence, and develop strong communication skills that supported their learning. This also helped children develop healthier lifestyles.

Mealtimes at the early years centre were unhurried and relaxed, creating a warm social atmosphere for children. Staff supported this by sitting with children, engaging in conversations, and providing support to ensure their safety. Children used their picture cards to help them choose what they wanted for lunch. Children were also gently encouraged to explore foods they had not tried before, empowering them to explore new flavours and make mindful meal choices.

Children's health and wellbeing were fully supported through robust management of medication. Before starting the service, the staff met with families to gather information about their child's medical needs. This attention to detail and individualised approach ensured that staff fully understood children's health needs. As a result, these processes supported children's overall wellbeing.

Children were given the opportunity to express their emotions and feelings. Their voices were heard in discussions about their wellbeing, learning, and development. For instance, small group activities encouraged enthusiastic participation. During these sessions, children learned to follow a picture plan to

build with LEGO and used visual aids to support their social and emotional development. This thoughtful approach fostered warm and nurturing interactions with staff who offered praise, attention, and reassurance. As a result, children felt valued and understood, helping to build strong, positive relationships.

Staff collaborated with families to create personal plans for children. Parents and carers shared detailed information about their child's routines, preferences, and needs. These plans were reviewed and updated every six months to reflect any changes, ensuring care remained responsive and tailored. This approach supported continuity between home and the setting, helping children to feel safe and secure.

Quality indicator 1.3: Play and learning.

We observed children who were happy and engaged in leading their own play and learning, with support from staff when needed. Toys and resources had been organised to foster their curiosity, creativity, and imagination. For example, children enjoyed playing with toy animals and discussing their pets while staff joined the play. As a result, children engaged well with each other and played cooperatively, using their imagination and curiosity.

Planning approaches were child-centred and responsive to children's interests and life experiences. Staff were knowledgeable about child development and used this knowledge to support their provision of high-quality play and learning experiences. For example, children were learning about patterns and matching shapes. There were also plenty of natural and open-ended resources, as well as real-life materials, which encouraged problem-solving. Children were highly engaged playing with balls and pipes. They enjoyed exploring speed and distance as they moved the height of pipes to experiment. Staff were skilled in supporting this play and asked children encouraging and curious questions that helped extend their learning.

To support their learning, staff actively listened to children's voices. Children could influence the experiences offered, and staff planned and implemented opportunities based on children's needs and interests. Children's progress and learning were recorded in planning and online journals to evaluate and identify the next steps to support children in their learning. Parents shared positive feedback about the quality of their children's play and learning. One said, "I know there is a lot for my child to do and take part in and any special interest my child gains, they always help them to learn more about the subject." Another added, "My child is learning on the board, which my child loves, as I've seen in my child's learning journal. My child finds this a fun way of learning letters and numbers. My child also loves sensory play, which they are always involved in." As a result, children were making good progress.

Staff responded to children's requests. For example, a child was drawing with chalk while a staff member encouraged them to add arms and legs to their creation. Another staff member was writing labels, and a child was sharing resource copies and made their own labels. This supported the children's mark-making and early writing skills.

Children benefitted from meaningful connections with their local community through visits to the park, care home, and walks around the local area. A parent shared, "My child enjoys walks around the centre grounds, trips to the park, or just playing in the nursery garden." These experiences supported their understanding of the world around them and fostered a sense of belonging.

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 setting was extremely comfortable and welcoming, with plenty of natural light and ventilation. Furnishings were of a high standard. Children had ample space to play and explore their surroundings. We observed children enjoying a story in the quiet area, which was furnished with comfortable sofas and cushions. This gave children a sense that they mattered.

Play spaces reflected children's current interests and curiosities, and contained good-quality toys and materials that supported their learning. For example, children enjoyed playing with animals indoors, and whilst outdoors, they played with balls and drew with chalk. The environment was thoughtfully structured to reflect the interests and developmental stages of all children.

The outdoor play area was accessible directly from the playroom to the children. Featuring a variety of resources, such as sand trays, water trays, a balance board, a mud kitchen, and tyres with stones to dig in, as well as balls, pipes and tunnels. Parents shared their thoughts on outdoor learning and said, "Great outdoor area within nursery with plenty of things to engage and challenge my child," and "My child enjoys water play, mud kitchen, scooters, big hill, playing tig, just enjoying being outside." This supported children's energetic play and learning about the world around them.

Real-life resources, such as pots, pans, and empty food boxes, supported children's imagination, curiosity, and critical thinking skills. Open-ended materials were available indoors and outdoors. For example, children were enjoying building with the blocks and playing with the pipes and tubes outside. This supported children's imaginative play and learning as well as their gross motor skills. The large variety of high-quality toys and materials supported children in developing their play in a way that met their needs.

Infection prevention and control measures were in place throughout the service to minimise the spread of infection. Children were reminded and supported to wash their hands. Staff washed their hands often, role modelling for children and sharing the importance of good hygiene. This helped keep children safe and well.

Information about children was stored securely. Management was aware of their responsibilities to ensure confidential information was stored safely. This protected children's privacy.

How good is our leadership?

6 - Excellent

We evaluated this key question as excellent, where performance was sector leading with outstandingly high outcomes for children.

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

The service was exceptionally led by a strong, approachable manager who delegated tasks carefully to build leadership capacity across the service and sustain improvement. Outstanding direction was provided to the team, who were passionate and extremely focused on delivering positive experiences to children and families. This resulted in high staff morale, which had a positive impact on the children's experiences. We were confident that the leadership approach ensured a consistently high standard of care and support for children and families.

The passionate and enthusiastic team were fully committed to delivering high-quality experiences for children and families. The nursery's vision and values supported a nurturing, inclusive environment where children could thrive. It also guided staff to deliver consistently high-quality care, play and learning tailored to each child's needs. We observed practice that reflected this vision. For example, the staff team was dedicated to creating a learning environment that promoted independence and choice. As a result, children felt safe, secure, and happy in the setting.

The service improvement plan was clear, evidence-informed, and co-created with staff and families. It set measurable goals that drove continuous improvement in outcomes for children. One element of the improvement plan was focused on promoting children's language and communication. This was informed by best practice guidance and research, ensuring the support offered to children met their needs. For example, the staff gave children time to process questions, using thoughtful prompts to support communication. They used picture aids, singing, and rhymes. This was implemented through a measured, planned approach, which was informed by current best practice guidance and research. Improvements were continually thoroughly evaluated and included the views of children, their families, and other professionals. As a result, improvements in the setting were having a positive impact on outcomes for children.

Robust self-evaluation and quality assurance processes had led to improved outcomes for children. Children, families and staff were regularly asked to share their feedback about the quality of the service. The reflective team effectively used this information to reflect on and improve their practice. As a result, children benefitted from a team that continually strived for excellence.

The aspirational goals of the team to deliver high-quality early learning and childcare meant that staff were attuned to the needs of families and children. As a result of the empowering ethos fostered by the manager, the team supported each other through a genuinely shared leadership approach. This demonstrated a collaborative approach to improvement, and consequently, the team provided outstandingly high-quality care and support.

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 staff team were warm, welcoming, and caring. This promoted a positive environment for children and families. The nursery was appropriately staffed, and staff were suitably deployed throughout the day to meet children's needs. Throughout the service, there was a focus on the children as individuals; this ensured that individuals' needs were consistently met.

Staff worked well as a team, and their different skills and knowledge complemented each other. This resulted in positive interactions with the children. Parents told us about the positive aspects of children's experiences in the service: "Staff are really good & patient with my child. They always make a point to ask about our family and anything that's been going on in our lives which means a lot for us, as we know my child is at a centre with a lot of caring people;" "Staff are outstanding, I feel very comfortable in telling them any concerns I have for my child (which there never is). I am always kept up to date with information;" and "They are all amazing at what they do, always met with a smile at pick up and drop off, I highly recommend the nursery to anyone who asks."

Staff positioned themselves appropriately to ensure children were safe as they moved between areas, providing maximum supervision. Staff communicated well with each other, transitions were planned, and children were familiar with the daily routine. This created an environment that promoted children's rights and helped keep them safe.

The management team effectively supported staff by spending regular time on the nursery floor. This helped to build positive working relationships and allowed time for staff to engage in professional discussions that enhanced the way they delivered children's care. Staff were happy, engaged, and shared tasks by working as a team. This ensured the day ran smoothly and that children were always aware of who was providing their care.

Arrangements were in place to promote continuity of care across the day. Staff breaks were well planned and supported by staff who provided lunchtime cover. This ensured minimal disruption to children's play, learning, and routine.

All staff members expressed that they felt well-supported by their management team and colleagues. One staff member shared, "We have regular wellbeing checks with the management team. I feel that I have a strong relationship with my management team and could go to them whenever I need anything. I couldn't ask for a better head of centre." This supportive environment helped staff feel valued and clarified their roles and responsibilities, leading to positive outcomes for the children.

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

James Hamilton Early Childhood Centre should ensure that children's personal plans reflect how children's health, welfare and safety will be met.

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).

This area for improvement was made on 13 November 2019.

Action taken since then

Personal plans had been created which give clear and incorporated clear details about children's needs. They also contained the next steps to support children's development. Personal plans were being used as live documents, which ensured children were receiving the right care at the right time.

We were satisfied with the progress the service has made.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

To enable the children to independently access the outdoor play area, James Hamilton Early Childhood Centre should review the children's access to the outdoor area.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I can choose to have an active life and participate in a range of recreational, social, creative, physical and learning activities every day, both indoors and outdoors' (HSCS 1.25).

This area for improvement was made on 13 November 2019.

Action taken since then

Children had freeflow access to the outdoors throughout the inspection. Children could access this independently and choose to play outdoors or indoors.

We were satisfied with the progress the service has made.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 3

It is recommended that the service develops a consistent system to record children's identified needs and show how these will be met by the service.

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).

This area for improvement was made on 13 November 2019.

Action taken since then

Children's plans were thoughtfully developed, clearly outlining their individual needs and documenting how the service was addressing them. Staff demonstrated a strong understanding of these needs and provided effective support to help each child reach their full potential.

We were satisfied with the progress the service has made.

This area for improvement has been met.

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	6 - Excellent
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?	6 - Excellent
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	6 - Excellent

How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good
4.3 Staff deployment	5 - Very Good

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