Smilechildcare - Pre-School Day Care of Children

17 Calder Grove
Edinburgh
EH11 4LZ

Telephone: 01314 767 800

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
30 October 2026

Service provided by:
Smilechildcare

Service provider number:
SP2003002814

Service no:
CS2003011838

About the service

Smilechildcare pre-school is operated by Smilechildcare, a childcare organisation. The service is registered to provide care for up to 70 children aged from six weeks to those not yet attending primary school. It is located within a three-storey building in a residential area of Edinburgh.

The service comprises of two playrooms designed to meet the differing needs of children across the age range, alongside two large outdoor environments that support active play, exploration and learning. Children also benefit from access to a range of dedicated spaces, including a sensory room, construction room, family room and dining area.

The service is situated close to shops, parks, transport links and other amenities.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 28 October 2026 between 08:30 and 18:00 and 29 October 2026 between 08:00 and 15:45. Feedback was shared with the service on 30 October 2026. 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 previous inspection findings, registration and complaints information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since last inspection.

To inform our evaluation we:

- spent time with children using the service
- received feedback from 20 families of children who attended the service
- spoke with staff and the management team
- spoke with five families in person
- assessed core assurances, including the physical environment.
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

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

- Strong leadership and a positive culture of improvement supported better outcomes for children and families.
- Children and families were actively involved in evaluating the service. Their ideas and suggestions were valued and used to inform positive change.
- Children experienced engaging, child-centred learning that supported confidence, independence and enjoyment.
- Further opportunities exist to extend learning through open-ended questioning, supporting learning at home and strengthening community links.
- Children's health, wellbeing and individual needs were supported through effective care planning, safe medication systems and responsive staff practice.
- Warm, nurturing relationships helped children feel safe, secure and supported in their wellbeing.

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	5 - Very Good
Children play and learn	4 - Good
Children are supported to achieve	5 - Very Good

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

Leadership 5 - Very Good

We found major strengths in this aspect of the setting's work and identified very few areas for improvement; therefore, we evaluated this quality indicator as very good.

There was a strong commitment across the staff team to achieving positive outcomes for children and families. Staff embraced continuous improvement and were actively involved in the service's improvement journey. This told us that leaders had created a positive culture of improvement, where staff felt valued, empowered and actively involved in shaping developments within the service.

The service values were embedded throughout practice. Families reported that children experienced a safe, nurturing and inclusive environment where diversity was respected and individuality valued. This contributed to children feeling secure, respected and supported within the setting.

Staff had opportunities to undertake leadership roles, which supported the development of their skills, knowledge and confidence. As these roles continue to develop, there is scope to further evaluate their impact on outcomes for children and service improvement.

The improvement plan demonstrated a clear understanding of strengths and areas for development. Priorities were realistic and informed by self-evaluation activities, with evidence of progress across several areas. Children's views were increasingly influencing planning approaches, resulting in more meaningful and child-centred experiences.

Staff and families had engaged with the Quality Improvement Framework through reflective discussions, supporting a shared understanding of improvement priorities. Staff were actively involved in self-evaluation, including reviewing policies, risk assessments and key aspects of practice. We discussed using playroom observations to further support reflection, professional dialogue and the sharing of effective practice.

Families told us they felt informed and involved in the life of the setting. Newsletters provided updates on children's learning, service developments, events, outdoor experiences and staff training. Daily conversations, observations and learning journals were also valued by families as effective ways of staying involved in their child's learning and development. This helped strengthen partnerships with families and supported continuity in children's learning and care.

We discussed opportunities to further strengthen family participation by providing clearer information about the different ways families could contribute to experiences and the wider life of the setting. While families had the opportunity to collect children from the playrooms, we suggested raising awareness of this and the benefits it could bring. Promoting these opportunities more consistently could increase family engagement and further strengthen collaborative partnerships between families and staff, supporting positive outcomes for children.

Families had access to a range of opportunities to provide feedback, from the start of their nursery journey, through room transitions, and when children left the nursery. This enabled the service to gather meaningful feedback at key stages of children's experiences. We saw evidence that feedback had informed improvements and outcomes were beginning to be shared with families. Continuing to embed this approach will strengthen family involvement in service improvement.

Minutes from staff meetings reflected a culture of continuous reflection and improvement. We discussed revisiting previous actions to monitor progress and ensure improvements were sustained. Allocating improvement activities according to staff interests and strengths could further promote ownership and accountability.

Recruitment procedures supported the safe appointment of staff, and staff reported feeling well supported in their roles. Staff participated in appraisal processes that encouraged reflection on achievements, strengths and professional learning needs.

Training records demonstrated a strong commitment to professional learning, including nurture, communication and play. Staff and leaders described how learning had influenced practice and improved experiences for children. The National induction resource was used alongside setting-specific information, supporting new staff to develop a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities from the outset.

Children play and learn 4 - Good

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

Children were happy, engaged and actively involved in their play, confidently leading their own learning. A balance of child-led and adult-led experiences supported their interests while providing appropriate challenge. Staff responded sensitively to children's ideas and interests, promoting ownership of learning. We discussed making greater use of open-ended questioning to extend thinking and problem-solving skills.

Provocations were used to promote curiosity and discussion. Building on these in response to children's interests will help extend learning and engagement. We discussed making children's interests and learning more visible outdoors through displays, books and provocations, supporting to develop learning across environments.

Praise and encouragement from adults and peers supported children's confidence and resilience. Children demonstrated strong independence and self-help skills, which staff actively promoted and families identified as a key strength of the service.

Children benefited from opportunities to access indoor and outdoor play and make choices about where they played. Where free-flow access was not possible, children were regularly supported to move between environments. This promoted wellbeing, independence and decision-making skills.

Throughout our visit, staff were observed singing, reading stories and engaging children in meaningful conversations. This supported language development and helped create a positive culture for literacy. A dedicated construction area provided opportunities for children to develop creativity, problem-solving and early mathematical skills through play.

Families spoke positively about the experiences available to children. One parent shared, "The nursery environment is lovely and has plenty of challenge for the children," while another commented, "At the nursery they seem to enjoy a wide range of activities like playing outside, messy play and reading." This told us that families valued the varied and engaging experiences available and felt these supported children's learning, development and enjoyment.

Some families shared they would welcome more information about how learning is extended within the nursery and how this could be supported at home. We saw evidence that the service had begun to respond to this feedback by using digital platforms to share how learning is supported within the setting and how children's individual learning goals could be reinforced at home. We discussed further strengthening this approach by sharing practical ideas for literacy and numeracy at home, helping families feel more confident in supporting their child's learning.

While some families would have welcomed additional learning journal entries, the majority were satisfied with the quality and frequency of observations. We saw that children's learning was becoming more visible through observations linked to learning priorities and progress over time. Learning priorities were shared with families, who were encouraged to contribute information from home, supporting a shared understanding of children's development.

Children's achievements were celebrated through a range of approaches, including star moments, the wow tree, photographs and displays. These recognised achievements both within the setting and at home, helping to build children's confidence, sense of belonging and pride in their successes.

Mind maps and observations showed that children's views were listened to, valued and used to inform planning. While positive work around children's rights was evident, we discussed making rights more visible within planning to further support children's participation and understanding of their rights.

Systems were in place to track children's progress and inform next steps. Tracking information demonstrated progress in literacy, numeracy and wellbeing. We suggested including a brief summary of interventions and supports within tracking records to strengthen evaluation and identify approaches having the greatest impact on outcomes for children. This would support a clearer understanding of what is making the greatest difference to children's progress.

Children are supported to achieve — 5 - Very Good

We found major strengths in this aspect of the setting's work and identified very few areas for improvement; therefore, we evaluated this quality indicator as very good.

We observed a warm, nurturing and inclusive environment where children felt safe, respected and valued. Caring, responsive staff built positive relationships and supported children's wellbeing and development. Children demonstrated secure attachments with familiar practitioners who responded sensitively to their verbal and non-verbal communication, promoting emotional wellbeing and confidence.

Calm, welcoming spaces, including cosy areas, a sensory room and quiet spaces, supported children to regulate their emotions and relax when needed. Practitioners helped children recognise and manage their feelings, building resilience and positive relationships.

Feedback from families reflected the strong, caring relationships staff had built with children and those important to them. One parent shared, "It is clear that the staff genuinely care about the children, and it is reassuring to know that they are happy, safe and well looked after," while another added, "I feel that the staff know my child as an individual and understand their personality, interests and needs." This demonstrated that children experienced nurturing care and families felt confident in the support provided.

Transitions were recognised as a gradual process involving children and their families. Parents valued this approach and told us children were well supported to move between rooms. Opportunities for children to

spend time together across the nursery promoted belonging. We discussed further strengthening transitions through visual supports and ongoing communication when changes occur. This would help children and families feel secure and prepared during periods of change.

Mealtimes were calm and sociable, with staff promoting communication, choice and independence. Children developed self-help skills through serving themselves and making choices. Families identified home-cooked meals as a strength of the service. One parent shared, "My child loves the food provided at nursery. It always seems healthy and well balanced, and staff are skilled at promoting positive relationships with food." Children were encouraged to sample new foods and explore different tastes, supporting healthy attitudes towards food and confidence in trying new experiences.

Staff demonstrated a strong awareness of children's health, safety and wellbeing. Dietary and medical needs were clearly recorded and communicated, and safe eating practices alongside appropriate supervision helped minimise risks.

Personal plans reflected children's strengths and needs and were reviewed with families. A new recording format provided a clearer overview of how care needs were identified, reviewed and met, supporting a more consistent and responsive approach.

Chronologies highlighted children's personal care routines, health and wellbeing needs, levels of independence and sleep arrangements. Rest and sleep routines reflected children's needs and families' preferences, helping children feel secure and settled throughout the day.

Clear medication records, effective monitoring systems and regular reviews helped ensure medication was administered safely and children's health needs were met. Health and safety checks and accident monitoring contributed to a safe, well-managed environment.

Families described a range of opportunities to be involved, including daily discussions at drop-off and collection times, newsletters, learning journals and stay-and-play sessions. Families expressed a wish for children to be more visible within the local community. The service had previous links with the library and community garden and planned to revisit these. This will help strengthen children's sense of belonging and create additional learning opportunities.

Family books with photographs in the playroom provided opportunities for children to talk about their families and experiences, supporting identity and belonging. The service also demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting families through flexible arrangements. A parent shared, "I feel fortunate to have this nursery in my vicinity," while another commented, "It's been great to have the choice where I use my funded hours, and I know I have made the right choice." This demonstrated that families felt valued, supported and confident in the care provided for their children.

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.scot.

Detailed evaluations

Leadership	5 - Very Good
Leadership and management of staff and resources	5 - Very Good

Children play and learn	4 - Good
Playing, learning and developing	4 - Good

Children are supported to achieve	5 - Very Good
Nurturing care and support	5 - Very Good

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.scot

Contact us

Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

enquiries@careinspectorate.gov.scot

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 cànain eile ma nithear iarrtas.

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.