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:
27 May 2026

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.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 25 and 26 May 2026. 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 10 families.

Key messages

- Overall staff were warm and nurturing in their interactions, offering reassurance and comfort, which helped children feel settled and secure.
- Families spoke positively about the staff team.
- Children accessed a range of play experiences, including creative, sensory and imaginative activities.
- Opportunities to extend children's interests and deepen learning were sometimes missed, which limited the overall quality of play and learning.
- Improvements were made to ensure that a sufficient number of staff were consistently deployed to support children's health, welfare and safety.
- Significant improvements were made to both the indoor and outdoor environment.
- Approaches to meeting children's individual needs were not yet consistently effective.
- All previously identified requirements have been met, with three areas for improvement remaining.

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	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Children thrive and develop in quality spaces	4 - Good
Children play and learn	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Children are supported to achieve	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

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

Leadership 3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

We evaluated this heading as satisfactory/adequate where strengths just outweighed the weaknesses.

Quality Indicator: Leadership and management of staff and resources

The setting had revisited its values, helping to establish a shared direction for practice. Work was at an early stage and not yet fully embedded, resulting in variability in the experiences children received. Further development of a shared understanding of the values Ready, Respectful, Safe and Determined would support greater consistency and improved outcomes for all children. This had been appropriately identified by the leadership team as a priority through the service's Rights Respecting Schools work.

Overall, engagement with key stakeholders, including parents and children, in service developments was positive. Parents reported having opportunities to share their views and contribute to improvement. Almost all parents felt that their feedback was valued and considered. However, one parent shared that their suggestions were not always taken forward.

Since the last inspection, some progress had been made to improve outcomes from children. This was supported by an action plan to guide improvement which had led to some positive changes. For example, improvements to staff deployment. However, the pace of progress in other areas had been too slow. As a result, improvements were not consistently reflected in children's experiences. In particular, approaches to meeting children's individual needs remained inconsistent. This meant not all children were fully supported in their care and learning.

The action plan had not yet been effectively extended to influence individual practice, limiting the impact of improvement work. Consequently, children did not consistently experience high-quality, responsive care across the setting. (See Area for improvement 1)

Staff reported feeling supported by the leadership team and demonstrated a clear commitment to improving their practice. There was a positive ethos across the service, with staff showing a willingness to reflect, share ideas, and identify areas for development. Leadership groups had begun to support improvements and some early changes such as, enhancements to the learning environment were evident.

Self-evaluation processes were developing but were not yet systematic or clearly linked to measurable improvements in outcomes for children. Strengthening these processes will help ensure a more consistent approach and improved outcomes for all children.

Quality Indicator: Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

Overall, staff demonstrated caring and nurturing interactions, building positive relationships that supported children to feel safe and valued. However, occasional inconsistencies meant that children's rights were not always fully respected.

Since the last inspection, improvements to staff deployment had been made, and there was a sufficient number of staff to meet children's needs. Staff worked well as a team, communicating clearly and supporting each other. This helped ensure routines and transitions were generally smooth and well managed.

The quality of interactions across the staff team was variable, with staff not always using effective strategies to support and extend children's play and learning. As a result, children experienced differences in the quality of support they received, which impacted their experiences.

Support and supervision processes were not yet having a sufficient impact on improving practice. Targets and expectations were not clearly defined, limiting accountability. This reduced the effectiveness of these processes in driving sustained improvements for children.

Some professional learning undertaken had a positive impact on children's experiences. For example, bike ability training supported children to develop confidence and new skills through biking experiences, and environmental improvements enhanced aspects of play. Training in child protection had also strengthened staff awareness, helping them to better recognise and respond to concerns and keep children safe. However, professional learning was not yet sufficiently targeted to ensure it consistently improved practice and outcomes for children.

Areas for improvement

1. To improve outcomes for children, the provider should ensure robust and effective monitoring of staff practice and the service as a whole.

This would include but not be limited to:

a) implementing consistent approaches to monitoring and evaluating individual staff practice

b) ensuring regular, meaningful observations of practice are undertaken and used to support improvement.

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).

Children thrive and develop in quality spaces — 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.

Quality Indicator: Children experience high quality spaces

Children benefitted from a welcoming and thoughtfully organised environment. Since the last inspection the service had made positive progress in developing both the indoor and outdoor spaces. This resulted in a calmer, more homely atmosphere that helped children feel comfortable and secure. Displays of children's work and the use of soft furnishings promoted a strong sense of belonging.

Resources were more accessible and better organised, enabling children to make independent choices and engage confidently in a range of play experiences. A variety of books were available throughout the environment, supporting children's interest in stories, early literacy and quiet, relaxed play. There remains scope to further develop literacy and numeracy resources to strengthen learning. The use of open-ended and real life materials encouraged curiosity and creativity. Further development of this and more consistent staff modelling, would support children to explore these resources more effectively.

Improvements to the outdoor area were a notable strength, offering enhanced opportunities for active play, exploration and appropriate risk-taking. These experiences supported children's confidence, physical development and overall wellbeing. The use of a child friendly mascot 'SIMOA the elephant' within the setting was a positive feature, helping children to recognise and assess risks within the environment and develop an awareness of how to keep themselves safe.

Children were consistently accounted for throughout the day, with regular head counts carried out by staff to ensure their safety. In addition, arrangements for the storage of information were secure, helping to protect children's personal information.

Children play and learn 3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

We evaluated this quality indicator as satisfactory/adequate where strengths just outweighed the weaknesses.

Quality Indicator: Playing, learning and developing

Children had access to a range of play experiences, including creative, sensory and imaginative activities. They were observed to be happy, engaged and generally settled, enjoying positive interactions with staff and peers. However, support for sustaining play was not always consistent. At times, adult expectations did not fully reflect children's preferences, which led to some disengagement and periods of less meaningful involvement.

Children benefitted from outdoor play, where they engaged in active experiences, took appropriate risks, and developed confidence and physical skills. Activities such as, climbing and bug hunting supported their curiosity, awareness of the natural environment, and overall wellbeing.

Some staff effectively supported early mathematical and sensory learning through everyday experiences, such as counting during snack and exploring colour, texture and size in play. There were also positive examples of early literacy development being supported. For example, through spontaneous storytelling. Children had opportunities to develop early writing skills through painting, mark making, cutting and outdoor chalking. These approaches were not yet consistent, and there is scope to further embed literacy and numeracy across the setting to strengthen outcomes.

Staff interactions varied across the setting. Some staff demonstrated effective skills in extending learning, scaffolding play and promoting curiosity. This supported children to engage positively in their play and learning. However, this practice was not yet consistent, and at times opportunities to build on children's interests and deepen learning were sometimes missed. This limited the overall quality of their learning experiences and progress.

Staff were developing their use of assessment to inform planning; however, this was not yet embedded in practice. As a result, learning experiences were not consistently well matched to children's individual needs and did not always provide the appropriate level of challenge or support. This meant that children were not always fully supported to achieve their potential in their learning and development. This was a previous area for improvement and remains unmet. (See Area for improvement 2 under 'What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement made at or since the last inspection?')

Children are supported to achieve — 3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

We evaluated this quality indicator as satisfactory/adequate where strengths just outweighed the weaknesses.

Quality Indicator: Nurturing care and support

Children were cared for in a welcoming environment. Overall staff were warm and nurturing in their interactions, offering reassurance and comfort, which helped children feel settled and secure. Families were welcomed into the setting, supporting positive relationships and regular communication. This created opportunities for informal information sharing, and families spoke positively about the staff team, with comments such as, "All staff are very friendly" and "I always find the staff warm and welcoming."

Approaches to meeting children's individual needs were not yet consistently effective. While some children were well supported, personal planning did not always provide clear guidance for staff, resulting in variability in how support was provided. As a result, children did not always receive the level of support required to fully meet their individual needs. Further development is needed to ensure that agreed approaches are clearly understood and applied. This was a previous area for improvement which remains unmet. (See Area for improvement 1 under 'What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement made at or since the last inspection?')

Snack experiences were calm and sociable, providing opportunities for positive interaction and communication. Staff supported routines and encouraged conversation, promoting social skills and language development. The use of real crockery and the presentation of flowers on tables contributed to a welcoming and homely environment, enhancing children's overall experience.

Children's lunchtime experiences were inconsistent. The playroom provided a more relaxed and positive environment. However, the canteen was less homely and inclusive, resulting in differences in the quality of children's lunchtime experiences.

Medication management processes were not yet consistently effective. Gaps in recording, checking and reviewing medication led to a lack of clarity for staff, with the potential to impact the safe and consistent administration of medication. This was discussed with the leadership team, who acknowledged the concerns and agreed to take appropriate action.

What the service has done to meet any requirements we made at or since the last inspection

Requirements

Requirement 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).

This requirement was made on 25 August 2025.

Action taken on previous requirement

Sufficient progress was made in meeting this requirement. The leadership team had begun to strengthen quality assurance processes, including clearer improvement planning. However, monitoring of individual staff practice was not yet consistently effective.

As a result, this requirement has been downgraded to an area for improvement to ensure robust and consistent monitoring of staff practice and the service as a whole. See Area for improvement 1 under the 'leadership' heading.

Met - outwith timescales

Requirement 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).

This requirement was made on 25 August 2025.

Action taken on previous requirement

Staff and child protection officers demonstrated appropriate knowledge of child protection procedures and implemented these effectively. Chronologies were used appropriately to support the identification and monitoring of children's wellbeing and safeguarding.

Met - outwith timescales

Requirement 3

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).

This requirement was made on 25 August 2025.

Action taken on previous requirement

Improvements were made to ensure that a sufficient number of staff were consistently deployed to support children's health, welfare and safety.

Met - outwith timescales

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

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).

This area for improvement was made on 25 August 2025.

Action taken since then

Personal plans did not consistently reflect children's current needs, and strategies to support individual children were not always clearly developed or effectively implemented. As a result, staff were not always fully informed to meet each child's needs.

This area for improvement has not been met and remains in place.

Previous area for improvement 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).

This area for improvement was made on 25 August 2025.

Action taken since then

Staff skills in observing, assessing and supporting children's play and learning had not been sufficiently developed. This resulted in inconsistencies in the quality of experiences for children and they did not always receive the appropriate level of support and challenge.

This area for improvement has not been met and remains in place.

Previous area for improvement 3

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).

This area for improvement was made on 25 August 2025.

Action taken since then

The environment was enhanced to provide a more welcoming, comfortable and homely space, with improved access to resources. This meant most children engaged more meaningfully in their play and learning.

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

Leadership	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Leadership and management of staff and resources	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

Children thrive and develop in quality spaces	4 - Good
Children experience high quality spaces	4 - Good

Children play and learn	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Playing, learning and developing	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

Children are supported to achieve	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Nurturing care and support	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

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