Mount Pleasant Nursery
Day Care of Children

Mount Pleasant Primary School
Castletown Road
Thurso
KW14 8HL

Telephone: 01847 893 419

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
13 May 2026

Service provided by:
Highland Council

Service provider number:
SP2003001693

Service no:
CS2003013517

About the service

Mount Pleasant Nursery is a day care of children service situated within Mount Pleasant Primary School in the town of Thurso. The service is registered to provide a care service for a maximum of 38 children aged two years to not yet attending school.

The service is situated in a residential area near a supermarket, shops, a park and other amenities. The children are cared for in a large playroom and have direct access to a large outdoor area.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 11 and 12 May 2026. Feedback was given to the manager and representatives from the provider on 13 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 seven families.

Key messages

- Children were cared for in a nurturing environment.
- Children experienced a calm and sociable lunchtime.
- Children's individual wellbeing did not consistently benefit from the effective use of personal planning.
- Recent improvements to the environment and resources increased children's engagement in play.
- Staff deployment did not meet children's needs and the approach to staffing was not outcome focussed.
- Quality assurance processes were not yet robust or consistently applied to secure sustained improvement.
- Four requirements and two area for improvement remain unmet since our inspection in November 2025. The provider needs to take immediate action to ensure the pace of change secures positive outcomes for children and their families.

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	2 - Weak
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 2 - Weak

We made an evaluation of weak for this heading, as there were some strengths but these were compromised by important weaknesses.

Quality Indicator: Leadership and management of staff and resources

Leadership arrangements did not consistently support high-quality experiences for children. Due to competing demands and limited capacity, the resources allocated to manage the service were insufficient to fulfil leadership responsibilities. Delays in appointing to key leadership roles further reduced capacity and continuity. This negatively impacted the service's ability to drive and sustain improvement. As a result, children did not benefit from a consistently well led service. This was identified as a requirement at the previous inspection in November 2025 and has not been met, it will therefore be continued. The provider must review current arrangements to ensure sufficient leadership capacity to deliver the required improvements. (See Requirement 1 under 'What the service has done to meet any requirements made at or since the last inspection?')

The service's vision, values and aims had been reviewed in consultation with staff. However, these were not fully embedded in practice. Although the manager had taken steps to promote them, staff understanding remained limited. As a result, there was no consistent shared approach, and children continued to experience variability in the quality of their experiences.

Action planning processes had not yet resulted in sufficient improvement in practice. An action plan was in place and was being regularly reviewed by the local authority. However, this had not yet led to meaningful or sustained improvements in practice. Targets were not clearly defined, limiting the ability to measure progress and ensure accountability. As a result, actions were not consistently implemented and improvements were not secured.

Quality assurance processes were not yet robust or consistently applied to secure sustained improvement. Some quality assurance processes were in place and had supported improvements in specific areas, such as changes to the indoor and outdoor environment, which enhanced aspects of children's experiences. Some monitoring of staff practice and children's experiences had taken place. However, these approaches were not applied consistently. Significant gaps remained, including the failure to address ongoing issues with staff deployment and the lack of effective auditing of personal planning. As a result, children were not yet benefitting from a service with a strong, embedded approach to continuous improvement. This was identified as a requirement at the previous inspection and remains unmet. (See Requirement 2 under 'What the service has done to meet any requirements made at or since the last inspection?')

Overall, the pace of change within the service was too slow to secure sustained improvement. Actions identified through quality assurance and self-evaluation were not progressed effectively or within appropriate timescales. All previously identified requirements and areas for improvement made at our last inspection remain unmet. As a result, children did not consistently experience improved outcomes. The provider must take action to strengthen leadership capacity, improve oversight and ensure that planned actions are implemented promptly and effectively. Without this, the service will not achieve the pace of improvement required to deliver consistently high quality care and learning experiences for children.

Quality Indicator: Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

The impact of staff training was not consistently reflected in day-to-day practice. Staff had completed some training in key areas such as, observation. However, there remained a need to further develop staff knowledge and skills for some staff, particularly in relation to high-quality interactions and child development. As a result, children's learning experiences were not consistently enriched or extended, and opportunities to promote their engagement, independence, and overall development were missed.

Support and supervision arrangements had improved in frequency since the last inspection, providing increased opportunities for reflection and guidance. However, these sessions were not yet consistently focused on professional development across the team. As a result, staff were not fully supported to improve practice or develop their skills to meet children's needs.

Staff demonstrated effective day-to-day communication at times. The use of walkie talkies supported coordination across the setting and enabled staff to respond to immediate needs, contributing to smoother routines and improved supervision. However, staffing pressures at times limited responsiveness.

Challenges linked to wider issues in staff deployment and capacity across the team, did not consistently support high-quality interactions. Issues relating to deployment had been identified at the previous inspection, and no improvement had been made. Limitations within the team and reduced flexibility impacted on the ability of staff to fully engage with children. This resulted in staff at times supervising from a distance rather than interacting meaningfully. As a result, children did not consistently benefit from high quality interactions or sustained engagement in play. This meant opportunities to support their learning, development and wellbeing were reduced. There was also the potential for children's safety to be compromised.

We made a requirement about this at the last inspection which remains unmet. The provider must take urgent and decisive action to address staff deployment and capacity issues to ensure children receive consistent, high-quality care, learning and supervision. (See Requirement 3 under 'What the service has done to meet any requirements made at or since the last inspection?')

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

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.

Recent improvements to the environment and resources increased children's engagement in play. For example, children enjoyed exploring water play with loose parts outdoors and engaged positively with the real-life resources indoors. These experiences enhanced their imagination and stimulated their curiosity. However, there remained gaps in the range of resources available, particularly in relation to numeracy. As a result, children did not consistently experience an environment that fully supported all areas of their learning. (See Area for improvement 1 under 'What the service has done to meet any requirements made at or since the last inspection?')

Children did not consistently benefit from a well-structured approach to developing language, literacy and communication skills. There were some positive examples of early literacy being supported through singing, stories, mark making and access to books. However, these approaches were not always consistently or effectively planned for, which limited their overall impact on children's progress.

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 missed. This limited the overall quality of their learning experiences and progress.

Staff were developing their ability to assess children's learning and use this to inform planning. However, this was not yet fully 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 requirements 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 nurturing environment. Staff were kind and caring in their interactions, offering reassurance and comfort. As a result, children appeared settled. However, staff understanding of child development was not consistent across the team. This limited the ability to tailor support effectively, and as a result, children did not consistently receive support that met their individual needs or promoted their progress.

Families were welcomed into the setting, supporting positive relationships and regular communication. This created opportunities for informal information sharing about children's needs, and families spoke positively about the staff team. Comments included, "The staff always make an effort to speak to me, and I never feel rushed or unwelcome" and "Staff are very friendly and easy to talk to."

Children's individual wellbeing needs were not consistently met, as personal planning was not used effectively to support staff in meeting children's needs. Approaches to supporting children were not consistent across the team, and staff were not always confident in how to support children to engage and make progress. There was also a lack of clarity around agreed strategies. This resulted in inconsistency in how children were supported, with care not always provided in a timely or coordinated way. We made a requirement about this at the last inspection which remains unmet. (See Requirement 4 under 'What the service has done to meet any requirements made at or since the last inspection?')

Snack and lunchtime 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.

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

Requirements

Requirement 1

By 27 March 2026, the provider must ensure that management arrangements are robust and effective in delivering safe, high-quality outcomes for children.

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

a) Clear leadership roles are established and implemented.

b) Effective systems are put in place for monitoring the effectiveness of the leadership arrangements.

This is to comply with Regulation 4 (1)(a)(b) (welfare of Users) of The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011(SSI 2011/10).

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 19 December 2025.

Action taken on previous requirement

Progress in securing effective management arrangements had been too slow. Leadership roles were not clearly defined or consistently implemented. Recent changes were at an early stage and were not yet impacting on outcomes for children.

Systems for monitoring and evaluating leadership arrangements were not robust. Some quality assurance processes were in place. These had not resulted in the level of improvement required.

Leadership oversight was not strong enough to ensure consistently high-quality outcomes for children. The provider now needs to accelerate the pace of improvement to strengthen leadership capacity, clarify roles and ensure effective monitoring arrangements.

This requirement has not been met and has been extended to 2 October 2026.

Not met

Requirement 2

By 27 March 2026, 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) regular and effective support and supervision for all staff is implemented

b) clear and effective plans are in place for maintaining and improving the service

c) the management team effectively monitors the work of each member of staff and the service as a whole.

This is to comply with Regulation 4 (1)(a)(b) (welfare of Users) of The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011(SSI 2011/10).

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 19 December 2025.

Action taken on previous requirement

Quality assurance processes were not yet effective in improving outcomes for children. Some systems had been introduced; however, these were not embedded in practice and had not yet led to meaningful improvements.

Improvement planning lacked clarity, with actions and expected outcomes not always well defined. Monitoring and supervision processes were not applied consistently. This meant staff did not always receive clear, targeted feedback to support improvement.

The pace of improvement was too slow, and changes were not yet having a meaningful or sustained impact on the quality of children's experiences.

This requirement has not been met and has been extended to 2 October 2026.

Not met

Requirement 3

By 27 March 2026, the provider must ensure that children are safe and consistently experience high-quality care, play and learning that supports their wellbeing and development.

To do this the provider must, at a minimum:

a) Ensure there is a sufficient number of staff available at all times to meet individual needs.

b) Ensure staff have the relevant skills, knowledge and capacity required for their roles.

c) Ensure staff are deployed effectively to enable high quality interactions and responsive support.

d) Implement effective monitoring of staff practice to maintain standards and identify areas for improvement.

This is to comply with Regulation 4(1)(a) (Welfare of users) of The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/210).

This is to ensure care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS), which state: 'I use a service and organisation that are well led and managed' (HSCS 4.23).

This requirement was made on 19 December 2025.

Action taken on previous requirement

There were ongoing concerns regarding staffing levels, skills and capacity. This meant children did not consistently experience high-quality care, play and learning. Staffing was not always sufficient to meet individual needs.

Staff deployment was not always effective in meeting children's needs. The quality of interactions and responsiveness to children needs was not always consistent.

Monitoring of staff practice was not yet robust enough to identify and address areas for improvement.

The provider now needs to take urgent action to strengthen staffing, build staff capacity and ensure effective oversight of practice.

This requirement has not been met and has been extended to 2 October 2026.

Not met

Requirement 4

By 27 March 2026, the provider must ensure that children's individual needs are consistently met through effective personal planning and informed practice.

To do this the provider must, at a minimum:

a) Ensure staff have a clear understanding of each child's holistic needs, including their interests, preferences and developmental stages.

b) Ensure personal plans identify specific, achievable strategies to support wellbeing, learning and development.

c) Ensure staff follow the information within personal plans to deliver responsive care and high-quality experiences.

d) Implement effective audits of personal plans and staff practice to ensure plans are accurate, up to date and consistently applied.

This is to comply with Regulation 4(1)(a) (Welfare of users) 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: '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 requirement was made on 19 December 2025.

Action taken on previous requirement

Children were not consistently supported in line with their individual needs or experiences. Staff did not always demonstrate a clear understanding of children's holistic needs. This meant approaches to supporting children were not consistent across the team. Staff were not always confident in how to support children to engage and make progress. There was also a lack of clarity around agreed strategies. This resulted in inconsistency in how children were supported, with care not always provided in a timely or coordinated way.

Auditing processes were not robust enough to ensure plans were accurate, up to date or consistently followed.

This requirement has not been met and has been extended to 2 October 2026.

Not met

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 ensure children experience high quality play and learning, the provider should support staff to develop the environment both indoors and outdoors.

This should include but is not limited to, organising resources and spaces to enrich children's play and promote creativity and curiosity.

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 19 December 2025.

Action taken since then

Some progress had been made in improving the environment, particularly outdoors, where improvements had enhanced opportunities for children's play and learning. This had begun to improve children's experiences and engagement. However, further work is needed to ensure both indoor and outdoor spaces are consistently well organised and used effectively to enrich children's experiences.

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

Previous area for improvement 2

To ensure children benefit from personalised and enriching experiences, which support their learning and development. The provider should support staff to develop their skills in engaging, responsive interactions that promote curiosity and creativity.

This should include but is not limited to:

a) upskilling staff to ensure interactions with children are consistently high quality.

b) strengthening planning processes to ensure they are child-led, flexible and informed by high-quality observations.

c) embedding a consistent approach to observation and assessment that clearly identifies children's progress and informs meaningful next steps.

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 19 December 2025.

Action taken since then

Interactions, planning, observation and assessment were not consistently effective in supporting children's learning and development. As a result, children did not consistently experience personalised, enriching opportunities.

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

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	2 - Weak
Leadership and management of staff and resources	2 - Weak
Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment	2 - Weak

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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Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

enquiries@careinspectorate.com

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