Ardgour Nursery
Day Care of Children

Ardgour Primary School
Ardgour
Fort William
PH33 7AB

Telephone: 01855 841 347

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
22 May 2026

Service provided by:
Highland Council

Service provider number:
SP2003001693

Service no:
CS2003013552

About the service

Ardgour Nursery is registered with the Care Inspectorate to provide a day care of children service to a maximum of 16 children from two years to those not yet attending primary school, of whom no more than five are under three years of age.

The service is provided from modern purpose built premises in the grounds of Ardgour Primary School. There is a playroom with reception area, toilets, kitchen facilities, a separate office and storage facilities. Children had access to an enclosed outside play area which surrounded the building.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Tuesday 19th May 2026, with feedback on Friday 22nd May 2026. This 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 throughout the inspection year.

To inform our evaluation we:

- spoke/spent time with the four children present during the inspection
- received one questionnaire completed by parents
- spoke with one parent
- spoke with two staff and the manager
- 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

- Children experienced warm, nurturing and responsive care that supported their emotional wellbeing and development.
- Staff built strong, nurturing relationships with the children and their families, creating a safe, supportive and positive environment.
- Children and families experienced consistent care and support from a committed staff team that fostered positive partnership working.
- Children were able to play and learn at their own pace, having fun as they explored the rich play experiences indoors and outdoors.
- The development of the outdoor play area continued to be a priority.
- Quality assurance, self evaluation and improvement planning were becoming embedded in practice and were having a positive impact on the 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	4 - Good
Children thrive and develop in quality spaces	5 - Very Good
Children play and learn	5 - Very 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 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.

Leadership and management of staff and resources

The nursery was an integral part of Ardgour Primary School and shared the same vision, values and aims. Children and families experienced a warm, welcoming and inclusive ethos where they felt respected, valued and included. Feedback from families highlighted the strength of nurturing relationships and inclusive approaches. The service demonstrated a commitment to reviewing their vision, values and aims with current families and staff helping these to remain meaningful for everyone. Opportunities to involve parents in this process, such as using stay and play sessions, were discussed and would strengthen ownership of the vision.

During the inspection, the manager and staff team engaged positively. They demonstrated an openness to advice and were committed to improvement to ensure they continued to provide a service of a high standard to the children and their families.

Self evaluation was purposeful and supported the service to identify appropriate areas for development. The manager ensured the views of all relevant stakeholders, including staff, children and families, were a central part of the self evaluation process and informed change, improvement and positive outcomes for children and families. The manager had created an environment where staff felt confident to share their views and ideas. Staff demonstrated a purposeful and well considered approach to self evaluation, with all team members understanding their role in driving improvement. Children and parents' views were reflected through floor books, observations and questionnaires. As a result, improvement planning led to positive change and enhanced children's daily experiences.

There was a whole school improvement plan which the nursery was part of. The development of the outdoor space was an identified action point. Supporting parental engagement, especially in the ongoing self-evaluation and improvement of the service, also continued to be a priority. Parents were encouraged to give feedback and suggestions as to how the service might be further developed. Continuing to develop the improvement planning process by incorporating clear timescales, defined responsibilities and regular evaluation of impact would support a more robust approach.

Quality assurance arrangements were in place to monitor the quality and consistency of the service. A quality assurance monitoring calendar provided structure for regular auditing and review, and supported the manager to monitor key aspects of the service, including accidents and incidents, and medication. Monitoring of staff practice took place largely through regular informal visits to the nursery by the manager and during discussion at team meetings. The manager should build on current practices and complete more formal monitoring of the playroom and staff practice with staff being provided with feedback. The continued development of more robust quality assurance processes would ensure that they consistently improve practice, the quality of the service and enhance outcomes for children.

Effective recruitment, induction and appraisal processes were in place, supporting safe staffing and professional development. The staff team were registered with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). Staff participated in annual professional reviews which recognised achievements, identified challenges and informed training needs. To support consistency and ongoing professional growth, consideration should be given to implementing more regular brief one to one check ins between the manager and staff. This would help to monitor progress, provide timely support and ensure professional learning was embedded in practice.

Children thrive and develop in quality spaces — 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.

Children experience high quality spaces

Children experienced an environment that was safe, welcoming and inspiring. The setting was clean, bright and well organised, with ample natural light and good ventilation. Both the indoor and outdoor spaces were well laid out and provided a variety of areas to play, to be physically active as well as to rest. This gave children a strong message that they mattered, were valued and provided them with a strong sense of belonging.

The playroom was well thought out and offered children appropriate levels of challenge, enabling children to develop confidence, resilience and build independence. There were homely touches and cosy areas which promoted emotional wellbeing. Children comfortably moved around the playroom and were focussed in their play. Staff periodically reviewed the layout to ensure the environment and resources were motivating and met the needs and interests of the children. This reinforced that children's views were valued and supported growing confidence, and a strong sense of ownership within the environment.

The staff all recognised the importance of regular outdoor play and the benefits of this for enhancing learning and wellbeing. The playroom opened directly onto the outdoor play area which continued to be developed by the staff and parents. There was a very good range of rich and meaningful learning opportunities, including water play, large mud kitchen, sand pit, and various pieces of equipment to support children's developing gross motor skills including balancing and climbing.

Staff took a positive risk benefit approach, and this supported children to assess their own risks and understand their own safety. Children engaged in experiences that allowed them to challenge themselves and take appropriate risks showing a good understanding of recognising and managing their own risks, for example when taking part in the balance activity outdoors.

During the previous inspection, the security of the door entry system was highlighted as a potential concern as was the height of the fencing to the side of the outdoor play area. In response to these concerns, work was completed to ensure that the entrance to the nursery was secure. The manager had escalated the request to improve the exterior fencing to the relevant department within the local authority. The manager and staff had also created an appropriate risk assessment in relation to the outdoor area which included the fencing. (see section 'What the service had done to meet any requirements made at or since the previous inspection')

Appropriate infection prevention and control practices contributed to reducing the risk of potential spread of infection Staff cleaned surfaces before snack preparation and any spillages were promptly cleared up. Handwashing was consistently embedded at key times, promoting children's health and wellbeing.

Effective arrangements were in place to ensure children and families' personal information was safe and secure. Paperwork was stored securely within locked cupboards. This ensured confidentiality was maintained and complied with best practice guidance.

Children play and learn 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.

Playing, learning and developing

Children experienced a rich, engaging environment which supported their wellbeing and development. Staff had created play spaces that promoted curiosity, creativity and independence. Children were encouraged to lead their own play and freely explore a range of experiences and activities that supported their development and interests. Experiences were thoughtfully planned and responsive to children's ideas. This contributed to children being happy, confident, and independent learners who were engaged in meaningful play.

The service demonstrated a strong understanding of how children learn and develop and this was reflected through experienced staff delivering high quality play experiences that supported children's confidence and progress in learning. This resulted in sustained levels of engagement, with children motivated and absorbed in their play as they explored and investigated through rich and challenging experiences.

Numeracy and literacy were firmly embedded within practice and were woven throughout the various areas within the setting, both indoors and outdoors. Children were able to freely explore a range of well planned and responsive opportunities including counting, measuring, mark making and early reading. Resources, displays and conversations with staff encouraged children to be curious and naturally explore literacy, numeracy and mathematical concepts during their play. Children were fully involved and had great fun when being read an interactive story which they had chosen. They enjoyed listening to the rhymes and taking part in the activities. Later, some of the children were fully engaged in a role play activity involving going for a picnic which was connected to a book they had read. They took part in counting and talking about what they would take to the picnic.

Staff interactions were calm, respectful and responsive and were adding value to children's play and learning. Staff naturally engaged with children and skilfully supported learning through effective interactions, including commentary, open-ended questioning and wondering aloud. This promoted children's critical thinking, problem solving and creativity. Staff made informed decisions about when to step back to allow children to lead their own play and when to re-engage to offer support, spark curiosity and sustain involvement

Children experienced a child centred approach to planning which reflected their interests, developmental stages and individual needs. Well thought out wall displays allowed children and their parents to see what the current interests were. Very good use was made of the children's art work and mark making, and photographs to illustrate what the children had learned. There were also floor books which were effectively being used to record how children's interests were extended and developed. They demonstrated that children were actively consulted and that their views were valued and influenced learning.

Each of the children had a learning journal which they were actively involved in updating with staff. Children were proud of their journals and their achievements. Each child's journal was personalised and demonstrated clear progression over time and meaningful observations summarized the individual child's learning. Children's voices were weaved throughout their journals through comments and choices to reflect their involvement in learning. Achievable next steps were identified and informed planning and supported continued development. As a result of this focussed and responsive approach, children were making good progress in their learning and development.

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.

Nurturing Care and support

Children benefitted from a warm, welcoming and inclusive environment where staff interactions were nurturing, caring and responsive. Positive relationships were evident, with staff knowing children well and responding sensitively to their individual needs. Children confidently approached staff for help, support and comfort, showing that they felt safe and listened to. Staff were kind, helping children to feel safe, secure and confident. Appropriate comfort, cuddles and reassurance was offered, supporting emotional wellbeing.

Staff interactions with children were consistently polite, calm and respectful. When supporting children to resolve disagreements, staff spoke gently and encouraged kindness and empathy. Children's achievements were recognised and praised, helping to promote confidence and self esteem. As a result children were observed to be kind and considerate towards one another.

Transitions were carefully planned and responsive to individual needs. Strong links with the wider community and school ensured children experienced continuity and familiarity. Opportunities to access shared school spaces and resources supported a smooth transition into primary school. For example, the nursery children had their lunch each day in the main school hall.

Snack and mealtimes were relaxed, sociable and inclusive with healthy food provided in line with guidance. Children were offered opportunities to develop their independence and life skills, for example pouring their drinks, self serving snacks and clearing their dishes. This created a sense of responsibility. Staff sat with children during mealtimes encouraging healthy habits, facilitating conversations and supporting language and communication skills.

Each child had a personal plan which supported staff to meet their needs. Plans were made in collaboration with parents and included key information to support children. Staff were very knowledgeable about children's needs, including allergies and dietary preferences. They had a strong understanding of individual children and how to support them effectively.

Working in partnership with families was a strength which had a very positive impact on outcomes for children. Positive working relationships with parents promoted and supported good communication and information sharing which in turn supported consistency and continuity of care for children. Parents were very positive in their comments about how welcome everyone was made to feel at the nursery and the strength of their relationship with staff. They reported how their children had made significant progress in areas such as confidence, speech and social interactions.

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

Requirements

Requirement 1

By 28 November 2025, the provider must ensure that children are kept safe by implementing effective systems to prevent children leaving the service and prevent strangers from entering.

This should include but is not limited to:
a) ensuring the premises are secure at all times;
b) reviewing the risk presented to children by the outdoor fence in the garden.

This is in order to comply with Regulation 4(1)(a) (Welfare of users) of the Social Care and Social Work and Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulation 2011 (SSI 2011/2010).

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:
'My environment is safe and secure'. (HSCS 5.19).

This requirement was made on 1 September 2025.

Action taken on previous requirement
Following the previous inspection, the manager initiated remedial work to improve the security of the setting. Work was completed to ensure the front entrance was secure and prevented children from being able to leave the setting unsupervised.

The manager had escalated the request to improve the exterior fencing to the relevant department within the local authority. They were currently waiting for this work to be progressed. The manager and staff had also created an appropriate risk assessment in relation to the outdoor area which included the fencing.

This requirement has been met.

Met - within timescales

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

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Leadership and management of staff and resources	4 - Good

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Playing, learning and developing	5 - Very Good

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

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