Onthank Early Childhood Centre
Day Care of Children

Meiklewood Road
Kilmarnock
KA3 2ES

Telephone: 01563 534 660

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
19 March 2026

Service provided by:
East Ayrshire Council

Service provider number:
SP2003000142

Service no:
CS2003014089

About the service

Onthank Early Childhood Centre is located in Kilmarnock, East Ayrshire. It is located in a purpose-built building in a site adjacent to Onthank Primary School. The service is provided by East Ayrshire Council.

The service is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 151 children not yet attending primary school at any one time. No more than 151 are aged 2 years to those not yet attending primary school full time with no more than 15 children aged 2 to under 3 years.

Children aged 3-5 years have access to five playrooms with access to secure outdoor spaces. Children aged 2-3 years have access to a smaller playroom with access to the outdoor area. The centre is located within walking distance of local shops, parks and amenities.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 17, 18, 19 March 2026 between 09:00 and 17:30. This inspection was carried out by three inspectors 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 and spent time with children using the service. We also spoke with ten friends and family members.
- Received 6 completed questionnaires.
- Spoke with 18 staff and the management team. We also received 22 completed staff questionnaires.
- Observed practice and daily life.
- Reviewed documents.
- Spoke with three visiting professionals.

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

- The service had strong, shared values and a positive ethos, resulting in warm, respectful relationships that supported children to feel safe, welcomed and valued.
- Nurturing care was a significant strength, with staff showing deep understanding of children's needs and consistently responding with sensitivity, compassion and attainment.
- Children experienced high quality play and learning in most rooms, with many examples of rich engagement, creativity and sustained involvement.
- Personal plans were effective and reflected children's holistic needs, supporting staff to deliver coordinated and meaningful care, including strong multi agency working.
- Families experienced trusting, respectful and highly positive relationships with staff, and valued the quality of communication, care and transition support offered.
- Leadership promoted continuous improvement and reflective practice, although monitoring of learning and assessment needed to be more consistent across all rooms.
- While practice was strong overall, inconsistency across rooms meant not all children benefited from the same high quality learning experiences, indicating areas for further development.

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 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 4 - Good

We evaluated this key area as good, as several important strengths were clearly evident and supported positive outcomes for children and families. These strengths provided a solid foundation for continued improvement.

The service's shared vision and values were well embedded and consistently reflected in daily practice. Staff demonstrated honesty, respect and care in their interactions, and senior leaders modelled these values clearly and consistently.

Families spoke positively about feeling welcomed, respected and genuinely recognised each day, which helped build trusting relationships and contributed to a warm, inclusive ethos. Staff also reported feeling nurtured and valued by the management team, supporting wellbeing, motivation and staff stability.

Leaders demonstrated a strong commitment to reflective practice and continuous improvement. Quality assurance processes were developing positively, and most staff felt confident to initiate change within their playrooms.

Management encouraged professional dialogue and self evaluation, which strengthened teamwork and collaboration. This approach had already supported more consistent practice and planning in most rooms. Staff described themselves as "a great team who work and communicate well to provide the best environment for our children," highlighting the positive team culture that directly benefits children's experiences.

Further strengthening of monitoring processes would help ensure consistently high quality practice across the whole setting. While most rooms demonstrated practice that aligned well with the service vision, there were occasions where targeted leadership support would help raise consistency. In a small number of areas, improvements were needed to aspects of the learning environment, hygiene routines and resource maintenance to enhance children's experiences.

Building staff confidence in risk awareness and interaction skills in these areas would further support safe supervision and nurturing care, ensuring all children receive the same high standard of provision across the setting. Strengthened oversight and timely follow up would help address these variations effectively.

Recruitment processes were managed centrally by the local authority, and leaders demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting staff as they joined the service. Further strengthening induction processes to align fully with national expectations would help ensure staff are consistently confident and competent in their roles, particularly during periods of increased demand. This would support greater continuity of care, safer practice and more consistent, high quality experiences for children.

Children play and learn 4 - Good

We evaluated this key area as good, as important strengths were evident and supported positive outcomes for most children. Many aspects of practice promoted children's wellbeing, enjoyment and engagement in learning, although greater consistency across rooms would further strengthen the experience for all children.

Children were highly motivated and deeply engaged in their play across most playrooms. In the 2-3 room, children sustained rich, imaginative play for extended periods, demonstrating confidence, creativity and strong involvement.

Children with additional needs were also supported well to explore independently, with staff showing good judgement in knowing when to sensitively support and when to allow children space to lead their own learning.

Across several rooms, children demonstrated cooperation, independence and self regulation, such as confidently leading role play scenarios, exploring sensory materials with curiosity, and benefitting from calm, comfortable quiet times before afternoon sessions. These experiences made a strong contribution to children's emotional wellbeing and enjoyment of learning.

Children's natural curiosity was valued, with some strong examples of responsive practice. Staff supported children to explore natural materials, engage in imaginative storytelling through resources such as song baskets, and follow their interests outdoors. For example, a child initiated bug hunt developed into an engaging shared learning experience. Where this responsive approach was most effective, children were encouraged to think, question and share ideas, resulting in joyful and meaningful learning moments.

The indoor environments were generally enabling, offering children choice and freedom to move between areas. Outdoor provision was developing, with clear improvement plans in place and progress already underway. Continuing to strengthen communication systems, including the consistent use of walkie talkies, would further support safe, well managed access between indoor and outdoor spaces.

Most staff interactions were warm, respectful and nurturing, helping children to feel secure and valued. Staff thoughtfully created calm areas and utilised breakout spaces to support children's emotional regulation.

There were opportunities to further extend learning through more consistent use of open ended questioning, language rich dialogue, numeracy and digital learning experiences. Strengthening these elements would help deepen children's thinking and provide greater challenge for all learners.

Planning and assessment approaches were developing. In rooms where practice was strongest, staff recorded meaningful observations, identified next steps in learning, and used floorbooks effectively to capture children's voices.

Developing staff confidence and consistency across all rooms would support more personalised, well sequenced planning and help ensure all children benefit equally from high quality learning experiences.

Children's achievements were celebrated warmly, and families were positively involved in sharing and contributing to children's learning journeys.

Children are supported to achieve — 5 - Very Good

We evaluated this key area as very good, reflecting the many strengths across the service that supported highly positive outcomes for children. Children benefited from a very high standard of nurturing care and support in most aspects of practice. Continued development would further strengthen consistency and enhance experiences for all children.

Children experienced warm, compassionate and attuned care from staff who demonstrated a strong understanding of nurturing principles and applied these meaningfully in practice. Staff recognised behaviour as communication, provided secure emotional bases and responded sensitively to children's needs. As a result, most children were confident, settled quickly into routines and formed secure, trusting relationships.

We observed many examples of calm, reassuring practice, including staff offering comfort on arrival, using gentle humour and soft tones, and positioning themselves at children's level to engage respectfully. During moments of dysregulation, staff interventions were generally thoughtful and effective, supporting children to regulate emotions and return positively to play.

Care routines were largely unhurried, personalised and respectful, which supported children's dignity and wellbeing. Mealtimes in most areas were relaxed and sociable, with staff modelling healthy choices and encouraging conversation. Nappy changing procedures were carried out discreetly and sensitively.

Staff worked closely with visiting professionals and effectively implemented shared strategies, leading to improved outcomes for children with additional needs. This collaborative approach ensured children's health, safety and comfort were prioritised well.

Transitions were calm, well planned and responsive for most children. Staff used enhanced strategies, comfort items and clear communication to support children as they moved between activities or rooms.

Outdoor spaces were used effectively to build relationships between age groups and support smoother transitions. Parents consistently described settling in processes as sensitive and reassuring and spoke very positively about the nurturing ethos of the service.

Personal plans were mostly well maintained, regularly reviewed and used meaningfully to inform day to day practice. Plans reflected children's holistic needs and demonstrated effective multi agency working where appropriate. Clear links between personal plans, SHANARRI indicators and learning journals supported coordinated, child centred care. Some variation in the depth and quality of recording had been recognised by leaders, who were already supporting staff to strengthen consistency and improve outcomes for children.

Partnerships with families were a significant strength. Parents described relationships with staff as trusting and supportive and shared examples of positive changes in their children's confidence, wellbeing and development. Families valued the kindness, reliability and flexibility shown by staff, particularly during times of change or challenge. Opportunities such as stay and play sessions, strong daily communication and personalised transitions supported families to feel involved, informed and reassured.

The strong culture of care and wellbeing within the staff team further enhanced children's experiences. Leaders fostered a supportive environment where staff felt valued, connected and confident to deliver nurturing practice. This positively influenced the quality of care children received and provides a strong foundation to further develop consistency across all areas of the service.

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	4 - Good
Leadership and management of staff and resources	4 - 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

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