Heathryburn Nursery School
Day Care of Children

Heathryburn School
Howes Road
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Aberdeen
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Telephone: 01224 788 180

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
9 May 2025

Service provided by:
Aberdeen City Council

Service provider number:
SP2003000349

Service no:
CS2003014442

About the service

Heathryburn Nursery School is situated within an annexe of Heathryburn Primary School in Aberdeen.

The service is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 40 children aged between three years and primary school entry at any one time.

Children have access to a large playroom with easy access to an outdoor area, toilets and a multi-purpose atrium. Children also access facilities in the wider school. The service is on a bus route and is near to local shops and facilities.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 8 May 2025 and 9 May 2025.

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:

- spent time with children using the service
- spoke with five parents/carers
- received 11 responses to our request for feedback
- spoke with staff
- observed practice and children's experiences
- reviewed documents.

As part of this inspection, we undertook a focus area. We have gathered specific information to help us understand more about how services support children's safety, wellbeing and engagement in their play and learning. This included reviewing the following aspects:

- staff deployment
- safety of the physical environment, indoors and outdoors
- the quality of personal plans and how well children's needs are being met
- children's engagement with the experiences provided in their setting.

This information will be anonymised and analysed to help inform our future work with services.

Key messages

- Children benefitted from consistently positive, nurturing interactions and staff fostered positive relationships with children and families.
- Staff knew children well and effectively met the needs of the group and individuals.
- Children experienced a balance of spontaneous and planned learning activities which were tailored to their needs.
- Staff were able to identify children's progress in learning and next steps. They were developing their skills in writing written observations to support this.
- Children enjoyed playing in a child-centred, well-designed environment.
- Positive outcomes for children and families were promoted through a culture of continuous improvement.
- Staff were well supported and worked well together to meet the needs of children and 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

How good is our care, play and learning?	5 - Very Good
How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
How good is our staff team?	4 - Good

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

How good is our care, play and learning? 5 - Very Good

We evaluated this key question as very good. We identified significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children.

Quality indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support

Children experienced consistently positive, nurturing interactions with all staff. Staff reacted warmly to children, picked up on their cues and offered support when this was needed. Staff had worked hard to develop opportunities for building positive relationships with children, and families and parents told us staff knew and supported their children well. Where children needed support to settle, parents were welcome to stay. These measures resulted in children feeling secure and cared for in the setting.

Children's care was supported through the effective use of personal plans. These held important information to support children's wellbeing. Staff were knowledgeable about children's individual needs and agreed strategies to support these. When necessary, staff worked with other professionals to agree targets, which were relevant to each child's needs, resulting in individualised support. Parents were involved in creating personal plans and reviewing information regularly to help ensure it was relevant and up to date. A keyworker system promoted positive relationships, with one parent commenting on how well this was planned to support a continuity of care and support for their family.

Children's mealtimes were generally positive. Children ate in the spacious atrium which enabled them to choose where they wanted to sit. Meals were appetising and children had some opportunities for independence when they poured their own drinks and self served some of their food. Staff sat with children while they were eating, however this was not consistent, resulting in some missed opportunities for supporting children. We discussed staff deployment to support further development in this area with management (see section 4.3 staff deployment). Children were encouraged to drink and had access to water bottles throughout the day to help them stay hydrated.

Children's health and wellbeing was supported through effective practice. Care routines, such as toileting were sensitive to children's developmental stages, and staff respected their privacy and encouraged independence at these times. This helped children develop autonomy and self-care skills. Medication was stored correctly, with written permission from parents. However, some administration records lacked parents' signatures. This raised the potential for information not to be adequately shared to promote children's health. The manager agreed to update forms to ensure these were recorded in future.

Parental engagement was a strength of the service, promoting a continuity of care and working together to meet children's needs. Parents were very comfortable in the service and were welcomed in daily, with some staying for extended periods. Families new to the service were supported with settling in visits, and opportunities to stay and chat with staff. Parents told us they had enjoyed attending groups and stay and play sessions with their children, and we observed parents' meetings, which were ongoing during the inspection.

Quality indicator 1.3: Play and learning

Children were engaged and happy in their play. Staff played alongside children, promoting fun and imaginative play and demonstrating skilled interactions to extend children's thinking. For example, children and staff enjoyed a game of dressing up together, trying on different outfits and "going shopping". Staff invited children to join in and supported children to understand the rules of games. This supported children to share, take turns and play co-operatively.

Children benefitted from a mixture of spontaneous and planned activities. Staff were knowledgeable about individual children's learning needs and valued children's preferred patterns of play (schemas). This included one child being provided with a trolley to help them gather and move items around the setting. They supported children's interests and used them to plan further learning. For example, when children were interested in a seagull nesting in the outdoor play area, activities such as bird watching, and exploring the life cycle of birds and how birds care for their young were planned. We observed children engrossed in these activities, with staff supporting them very well. Children were engrossed in these activities, supporting their progress and development.

Children were provided with opportunities to develop language, literacy and numeracy skills. Staff counted with children during daily routines. Daily focused group activities were planned to help children develop skills such as recognising shapes. Different types of environmental print supported children's early literacy skills, and children were supported to write their own names. Story of the week and a lending library promoted opportunities for parents to share in children's learning at home. These measures meant that children were able to access learning in ways that suited them best.

Children's learning was supported through observations, which were shared with parents on an online platform. One parent told us "The staff are supportive of my child, keeping me well informed of her progress". All staff were able to tell us how each child was being supported in their learning; however, some staff were more skilled than others at recording meaningful observations and next steps for learning. Management were aware of this and were supporting staff to develop their skills in this area to fully support planning for children's learning and development.

Children had opportunities to explore the school and wider community. They regularly accessed the sports pitch, P.E. hall and other school facilities. Older children visited the nursery and were welcome to join the nursery group on the sports pitch. This provided valuable opportunities for socialising and learning about the wider school. Weekly community walks and visits to local areas such as the duck pond provided interesting experiences and helped children build connections with their community. One parent commented "ELC are good at providing outdoor experiences for my child, including walks in the community and learning about the outdoors".

How good is our setting? 5 - Very Good

We evaluated this key question as very good. We identified significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children.

Quality indicator 2.2: Children experience high quality facilities

Children played in a welcoming, child-centred environment. The setting was spacious, with plenty of room for children to move around and play. Recent improvements included new flooring and furniture, with attractive displays contributing to bright, airy, pleasant surroundings. The foyer was used for group work activities and mealtimes, and parents benefited from a parents room where they could have private conversations with staff.

Staff had developed the environment to include zoned areas, where resources were easily accessed to promote play. Children could move resources around and use them as they wished. Comfortable areas, where children could rest and relax included the story corner, with a sofa, and a canopied area with rugs and cushions. These measures helped children feel comfortable in the setting and promoted the feeling that they matter.

Children had access to a range of play resources. Real life resources such as dressing up clothes, handbags, kitchen equipment, and a steering wheel promoted imagination and curiosity. Children had fun playing with loose parts such as building with crates in the construction area. Sensory experiences included sand and water play, and a member of staff made playdough with one of the children. The range of resources available met the diverse needs of the children attending well.

Children had daily access to outdoors. The outdoor area had been developed to create an inviting play space with cable reels for climbing, sensory experiences such as mirrors, musical instruments and planting. Although staff told us they would usually offer children free flow access to outdoors, this area could not be accessed during the inspection. A seagull had nested there, making the area unsuitable for children. Staff had made the most of this to develop learning opportunities for children with a project about birds. To ensure their safety, children played outdoors on the enclosed sports pitch, where they ran freely, played football and enjoyed organised games. This provided daily opportunities for active play, fresh air and exercise.

Children safety and wellbeing was promoted through infection prevention and control practices. Staff kept areas clean and tidy. Handwashing was carried out throughout the day. We identified that this could have been better supported to make sure that all children washed their hands thoroughly at key times such as after playing outdoors and after meals.

Children's safety was further supported by staff knowledge and practice. They spoke about the benefits of risky play, where children were supported to manage risks such as climbing. Staff involved children in conversations about ways to keep safe at times such as during the walk to and from the sports pitch. This resulted in a setting where children were able to play safely.

How good is our leadership? 5 - Very Good

We evaluated this key question as very good. We identified significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children.

Quality indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well

Children were cared for in a service with clear aims. The values of respect and empathy, which were included in these were embedded in daily practice. Information was shared with parents on notice boards and the nursery handbook. This provided comprehensive information to support families when their children started nursery. The head teacher told us that a child-friendly video and welcome booklet for children was currently being developed to further support children's transitions into the setting.

Families were able to be meaningfully involved in the development of the service. Regular questionnaires were used to gather parents' views. The response rate to these was low, however parents had frequent opportunities to join the nursery group and talk to staff. Most parents told us they felt listened to and we encouraged management to continue to use these opportunities to develop ways of gathering feedback. Children's views were reflected in their personal plans, where they were asked their likes and dislikes, and the responsive nature of the activities on offer. These opportunities helped children and families feel valued and respected.

Positive experiences for children were supported by effective quality assurance practices. Managers had continued to develop processes to provide a robust system, which had a positive impact on experiences and outcomes for children and families. This included regular audits of practice, and use of tools such as the Leuven Scale to assess children's engagement. Performance monitoring included individual support and supervision sessions, where staff could reflect on their own professional development.

Planned improvements were relevant and manageable. Improvement plans were displayed in a reader-friendly format to keep parents up to date with developments, and a "You said, we did" display let them see where their feedback had been acted upon to influence change and improvements. Staff knew the needs of children and families well, which helped to ensure that positive outcomes were at the heart of all improvement planning.

Staff were being supported to develop in their roles in supporting children. There was a clear culture of continuous improvement, and staff were encouraged to work together to use their skills and experience to promote positive outcomes for children. When asked for feedback, one staff member told us "The ELC Manager is very supportive and approachable, [their] dedication and determination to support and improve Heathryburn ELC is admirable. [They] know where we need to go as a setting and I look forward to the future".

How good is our staff team? 4 - Good

We evaluated this key question as good. We identified several strengths, which impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 4.3: Staff deployment

Children were cared for by a staff team who worked well together. Staff told us that they felt supported by each other and senior staff. Senior practitioners were working together to develop their roles in leading the staff team, and the head teacher was skilled at recognising staff's skills and where they needed support. Absences were managed well to limit disruption, and new and relief staff received an effective induction to support them to understand their roles. Together, these factors had a positive impact on outcomes for children.

Staff had been given areas of responsibility, which helped promote ownership and accountability. For example, one member of the team had led developments to outdoor play, whilst another took responsibility for group work to support children's language development. Staff took pride in their areas and were able to talk competently about how they supported positive outcomes for children. This helped ensure that developments met children's needs and gave children the message that they matter.

Children generally experienced continuity of care throughout the day. Staff communicated well with each other about children, and moved around the setting as needed to ensure children were supervised well. This was less effective at busy times such as mealtimes, pick-up and drop off times. During the beginning and end of children's meals, some staff were occupied with tasks, which meant that a few opportunities to support children were missed. At drop off times, parents had to wait to be let in and out, and a couple told us they found this frustrating. During these times, some children wandered into the atrium unsupervised, before staff noticed and took them back to the nursery room. When we discussed this with the manager, they were aware that this was an area that needed to be reviewed and hoped that ongoing recruitment would result in additional staff to support this.

Positive relationships promoted consistency for children. Staff demonstrated an understanding of the importance of fostering positive relationships with families through parents' visits, meetings and daily conversations. Most parents told us they knew the staff caring for their children, they felt they had a good relationship with staff, and that staff cared for their children well. One commented, "The staff in the nursery are EXCEPTIONAL there dedication, care and overall attitude is 100/100 could not fault".

Children's care and support was promoted through staff's knowledge and skills. Staff had regular opportunities to attend training, which was shared at regular team meetings. Team development sessions provided opportunities for staff to discuss and develop practice. This helped ensure that staff understood their roles and responsibilities in supporting positive experiences and outcomes for children.

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 staff have sufficient confidence, knowledge and skills to supervise children effectively, recognise and respond to their cues and consistently use agreed strategies to support their care.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which states that:

My care and support meets my needs and is right for me (HSCS 1:19).

This area for improvement was made on 29 April 2024.

Action taken since then
Staff have been supported to develop their understanding of their roles and responsibilities. We observed consistently high quality engagement and interactions with children to support their emotional wellbeing and development.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

To promote children's learning and development, the provider should ensure that all staff have sufficient confidence, knowledge and skills in supporting and extending children's learning.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which states that:

I am supported to achieve my potential in education and employment if this is right for me (HSCS 1.27).

This area for improvement was made on 29 April 2024.

Action taken since then
Staff have undertaken professional development in supporting children's learning through effective planning and observations. We observed significantly improved outcomes for children in this area, with individual learning needs being identified and met.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 3

To support children's wellbeing, the provider should ensure staff have sufficient confidence, knowledge and skills to work together to ensure high quality engagement and supervision throughout the day.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which states that:

'My care and support meets my needs and is right for me' (HSCS 1:19).

This area for improvement was made on 29 April 2024.

Action taken since then

The staff team worked together to ensure consistently high levels of engagement throughout the day. Deployment was generally managed well, with staff having clear roles and responsibilities. This contributed to a safe environment, with effective supervision of children.

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

How good is our care, play and learning?	5 - Very Good
1.1 Nurturing care and support	5 - Very Good
1.3 Play and learning	5 - Very Good

How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	5 - Very Good

How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	5 - Very Good

How good is our staff team?	4 - Good
4.3 Staff deployment	4 - Good

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