Hawthorn Family Learning Centre
Day Care of Children

2f Bogwood Road
Mayfield
Dalkeith
EH22 5DQ

Telephone: 01312 713 116

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
10 August 2026

Service provided by:
Midlothian Council

Service provider number:
SP2003002602

Service no:
CS2003015176

About the service

Hawthorn Family Learning Centre is a daycare of children service situated within Mayfield, Midlothian. The service is registered to provide care for a maximum of 48 children to end of primary school at any one time and to provide an outreach service to families in their own home.

There are three play spaces for different age groups, all of which have their own garden space directly off the playroom. There is also a community space and sensory room for all age groups to use.

The service is close to local shops and other amenities.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Tuesday 4 August 2026 between 09:00 and 16:15 and Wednesday 5 August 2026 between 09:00 and 16:45. The inspection was carried out by one inspector from the Care Inspectorate. The setting had a total of 80 children registered.

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 eight families
- spoke with staff and management
- reviewed electronic questionnaires from 20 staff
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents
- spoke with 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

- Children and families benefit from exceptionally strong, trusting relationships with staff who know them well and provide highly responsive, individualised support.
- The service demonstrates a deeply embedded trauma-informed and family-centred approach, with extensive support that reduces barriers and improves outcomes for whole families.
- Leaders have established a strong values driven culture with a clear commitment to achieving the best possible outcomes for children and families.
- Effective self-evaluation, team development and quality assurance processes support continuous improvement and a skilled, reflective staff team.
- Staff use their detailed knowledge of children to provide meaningful learning experiences that respond to children's interests, strengths and developmental needs.
- Highly personalised approaches to inclusion and transitions ensure children are supported to participate, progress and thrive.

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	6 - Excellent
Children play and learn	5 - Very Good
Children are supported to achieve	6 - Excellent

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

Leadership 6 - Excellent

We evaluated this key question as excellent where performance was sector leading with outstandingly high outcomes for children.

Quality indicator: Leadership and management of staff and resources

Leaders were highly ambitious and aspirational for those using the service. They worked proactively to reduce barriers and respond to need early, helping to ensure families received the right support at the right time. This commitment was evident in the extensive support available to families, including outreach and family wellbeing services, family learning, parenting support, food provision and income maximisation support. Leaders demonstrated a strong understanding of the impact that low confidence and adversity had on families and created meaningful opportunities for people to connect, build relationships and access support without stigma. For example, the Friday families group was developed in response to families expressing a desire for greater connection and informal support. What began as a small opportunity for families to stay for a cup of tea grew into a well-established network where families built relationships, increased their confidence and influenced the activities and supports available within the service. As a result, families felt a stronger sense of belonging, less isolation and more confidence in seeking support, leading to better outcomes for children and families.

The setting demonstrated an exceptional embedded culture of self-evaluation and continuous improvement. Staff viewed self-evaluation as an integral part of everyday practice and clearly demonstrated how reflective discussions, quality assurance activities and improvement priorities informed meaningful change within their playrooms. As a result, improvement planning was purposeful and closely connected to the experiences of children and families. For example, a key priority within the improvement plan was to ensure that children's voices were heard, respected and consistently recorded across the setting. Staff discussions and plans for play demonstrated a clear understanding of children's preferences, interests and responses.

Staff observed and interpreted children's gestures, body language and interactions during play experiences, using this information to inform planning and support individual learning and development. Staff advocated for children in professional meetings, by gathering children's views in creative ways such as art. Children's voices were evident throughout floor books, self-evaluation activities and day-to-day practice. These approaches demonstrated that regardless of age, stage of development or communication ability, every child had a voice that deserved to be heard. Children's rights, participation and inclusive practice were evident in the practice we observed, with children consistently leading in decisions that mattered to them.

Quality assurance systems were extensive and highly effective in providing leaders with meaningful oversight of practice. Audits, staff supervision, environmental reviews, training evaluations and reflective discussions supported far-reaching improvement and accountability. Highly successful monitoring and auditing arrangements supported a shared understanding of rights-based practice, resulting in consistently positive experiences and outcomes for children. This ensured children experienced exceptionally high-quality care and support that met their needs, interests and rights.

The leadership team had established an impactful learning culture where professional development was prioritised and valued. Staff consistently reported feeling well supported to access training, share learning and implement innovative approaches. Training in trauma-informed practice, attachment and safeguarding had strengthened confidence and enhanced practice in providing influential, sensitive and responsive

care. Leaders were described as approachable, nurturing and invested in staff wellbeing and development. As a result, staff felt empowered to contribute ideas, identify priorities and challenge practice. For example, following training on 'Birth and Beyond' guidance, staff developed an overview sheet as a quick reference tool and a system to track children's learning and development. This demonstrated how staff effectively translated learning into improvements in practice. Resulting in a highly efficient work with children that improved their outcomes and experiences.

The setting's successes were recognised and shared widely across the sector, reflecting its role in leading and influencing practice beyond its own service. The manager delivered a range of presentations to sector colleagues, showcasing innovative approaches that supported children and families to be safe, healthy, happy, resilient and to learn together. This demonstrated sector-leading practice and a strong commitment to improving experiences for children across the wider learning community.

Overall, leadership was an outstanding strength of the service. Leaders had created a culture of continuous learning, innovation and improvement, supported a highly skilled team who demonstrated a strong purpose in improving outcomes for children and families. As a result, children and families benefited from a service that continually reflected, evolved and enhanced practice, leading to exceptionally positive experiences and outcomes.

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.

Quality indicator: Playing, learning and developing

Children's experiences supported their wellbeing, development and enjoyment. Throughout the inspection, children were highly engaged in self-chosen play and confidently accessed a wide range of experiences indoors and out. Free-flow access enabled children to make meaningful choices about where and how they played, with most children choosing to spend extended periods outdoors.

The outdoor environment was a key strength and provided rich opportunities for physical challenge, loose parts play, water exploration, role play, storytelling, nature experiences and creative learning. The environment was well resourced and promoted independence, curiosity and active learning. Children were busy and had fun as they created a bike car wash, engaged in water play, cared for plants, built with loose parts and participated in football games with staff. The outdoors spaces also offered relaxing experiences through hammocks and swings. We saw children spending time in the hammock, enjoying the gentle movement, appearing calm and content. Children benefited from regular visits to community spaces such as the pavilion and community garden, where they were actively involved in planting and growing projects. These experiences helped children develop a sense of connection to their local community and the natural world.

The quality of interactions was consistently strong. Staff were warm, nurturing and responsive and demonstrated genuine care for children. Positive relationships formed a strong foundation for children's learning and wellbeing. Staff worked alongside children to extend play and support learning rather than directing experiences. We observed staff joining children's football games, supporting the creation of a bike car wash, extending water play experiences and encouraging children to think about and solve problems within their play.

Staff knew children well and understood their interests, needs and individual circumstances. They listened to children, observed what they were interested in and used this to plan experiences. For example in the baby room, children showed a strong interest in a particular teddy bear. Staff built on this by having a teddy bears picnic snack which then developed into the going on a bear hunt story. We observed a child choosing the book with excitement and making the noises from the story. As a result, children were engaged and enjoyed meaningful experiences that developed their confidence and built their vocabulary through experiences that felt familiar, safe and reflected their interests.

Staff responded sensitively to children's emotional needs, providing reassurance, praise and encouragement that helped them build confidence and persevere with challenges. For example, when a child appeared hesitant on a balancing structure, a staff member offered calm encouragement and reassurance, remaining nearby to provide support if needed. This helped children develop self-belief and resilience, encouraging them to take on new challenges and experience a sense of achievement in their play.

Planning and assessment of play and learning were child-centred and informed by children's interests, developmental needs and family contributions. Staff used a range of approaches, including observations, learning journeys, floor books, tracking systems and responsive planning methods. Children's voices influenced experiences and future planning, with staff demonstrating a commitment to ensuring all children were listened to and included. Personalised learning priorities ensured individual progress and development for all children.

Some areas for improvement were identified by the team and were being developed. Staff recognised that systems for recording responsive and in-the-moment planning were not always fully capturing children's learning. Opportunities were also identified to further develop literacy experiences outdoors and enhance the mud kitchen provision to maximise children's engagement.

Children are supported to achieve — 6 - Excellent

We evaluated this key question as excellent where performance was sector leading with outstandingly high outcomes for children.

Quality indicator: Nurturing care and support

Nurture was at the heart of life in the setting and was one of its most significant strengths. Staff understood each child's individual emotional needs and responded with kindness, sensitivity and genuine care. Through warm, responsive and trusting relationships, staff ensured children experienced care that was rooted in love, respect and understanding. Staff comforted children, supported personal care with dignity, and celebrated achievements through praise and encouragement. Children were consistently met with warm, responsive interactions. Relationships were unhurried and respectful, reflecting secure attachments and a deep commitment to children's wellbeing.

Staff showcased a nurturing and trauma-informed approach, recognising that children must feel safe, secure and loved before they can fully engage in learning. Their practice reflected the aspirations of 'The Promise' and the 'Infant Pledge', placing strong emphasis on understanding each child's experiences, responding with compassion, ensuring children felt valued, respected and heard. It was evident staff understood that every child had a voice, regardless of age, stage of development or communication ability and adapted their practice to respond to individual circumstances. As a result, children developed trust, confidence, resilience and a strong sense of belonging.

The outreach team provided exceptional support to families in their homes and the community, offering practical guidance with areas such as bottle feeding, helping families create safe home environments and providing compassionate emotional support during difficult times. This responsive and relationship-based approach reduced barriers and strengthened family wellbeing. Families experienced increased feelings of empowerment and resilience as a result.

Sleep and rest arrangements illustrated a highly responsive approach to children's individual needs, preferences and routines. Babies and young children were lovingly soothed and supported to sleep, helping them feel safe and secure. Flexible approaches ensured children could rest when they needed to, rather than following rigid routines. Staff recognised the vital role of sleep and rest in children's wellbeing and development and created calm, reassuring experiences that promoted emotional security, trust and strong attachments.

Mealtimes were calm, relaxed and highly sociable experiences where children confidently followed familiar routines, made choices and engaged in meaningful conversations with staff and friends. Staff used these opportunities to promote healthy eating, nurture positive relationships and support children's wellbeing. The kitchen was a visible and valued part of the nursery, with the preparation of meals contributing to the nurturing atmosphere of the setting. The team's commitment to supporting families extended beyond mealtimes. At the well-attended supper clubs, families played together in the secret garden and playrooms before enjoying a wholesome cooked meal alongside other families, staff and their children. Families described these events as "amazing", "great fun" and something they looked forward to.

Another strength of the service was the cooking on a budget groups, where families learned how to prepare affordable, nutritious meals such as chicken and leek pie. These sessions had built families confidence and practical skills, with one telling us they had asked staff to show them how to make specific dishes because of the positive difference this had made to their child's mealtimes. This promoted family mealtimes, strengthened relationships and created meaningful opportunities for families to connect, learn from one another and feel part of a wider community.

The highly successful approach to personal planning ensured that staff had a detailed understanding of children's needs. Staff gathered meaningful information about children's strengths, interests, routines and support needs through a range of approaches. These included All About Me information, learner plans and transition passports, for example. This information was reflected in practice, helping children feel safe, included and supported. Strong collaboration with education, social work and wider partners strengthened multi-agency approaches and secured the success of early intervention opportunities.

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.scot.

Detailed evaluations

Leadership	6 - Excellent
Leadership and management of staff and resources	6 - Excellent

Children play and learn	5 - Very Good
Playing, learning and developing	5 - Very Good

Children are supported to achieve	6 - Excellent
Nurturing care and support	6 - Excellent

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