St. Mary's Episcopal Nursery
Day Care of Children

Smithy Loan
Dunblane
FK15 0HQ

Telephone: 01786 822 740

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
30 September 2026

Service provided by:
Stirling Council

Service provider number:
SP2003002689

Service no:
CS2003015594

About the service

St Mary's Episcopal Primary School Nursery class is a daycare of children service provided by Stirling Council. The service is registered to provide a care to a maximum of 16 children aged three years to those not yet attending primary school. The nursery is part of St Mary's Episcopal Primary School.

The nursery consists of a playroom, outdoor play space and toilet facilities. The service is situated in the heart of Dunblane, with several local amenities close by such as a library, shops and woodland area.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 29 September 2026 and 30 September 2026 between 08.30 and 17:00. Feedback was shared with the service on 30 September 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:

- spent time with four children using the service
- received two completed questionnaires from families and three from staff
- spoke with one parent using the service
- spoke with staff and the management team
- assessed core assurances, including the physical environment
- 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

- Vision, values and aims were being reviewed to ensure they reflected the needs of children, families and the wider service community.
- The service recognised the impact of low attendance numbers and were exploring partnerships with other services to increase social opportunities for children.
- The nursery provided a warm, welcoming and well-organised environment that supported children's play, learning and development.
- Children experienced warm, nurturing care and positive relationships that supported their wellbeing, confidence and sense of belonging.
- Plans were in place to implement the national induction resource, supporting staff development and consistency of practice.

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	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

Quality indicator: Leadership and management of staff and resources

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.

The service was reviewing its vision, values and aims, alongside the development of a nursery charter. This demonstrated a commitment to ensuring the service's direction and aspirations reflected the needs of children, families and stakeholders. We encouraged the service to continue this work and clearly demonstrate how this reflected the current context of the service and informs practice. This would support a shared understanding of the service's ethos, priorities and commitment to continuous improvement.

Staff engaged in self-evaluation activities, including reflection on play and learning experiences and the outdoor environment. This demonstrated a commitment to improving practice and enhancing outcomes for children. We could see a positive direction of travel within the service and discussed the importance of maintaining a manageable focus on priorities that would have the greatest impact on outcomes for children. This would support sustainable improvement and help embed positive changes in practice over time.

The service was gathering views from families to inform improvement and development. This demonstrated a commitment to listening to stakeholders and using their feedback to shape the service. The service recognised the need to strengthen this approach further to increase participation and gather a broader range of views. This would help ensure improvement decisions were based on meaningful feedback and reflective of the experiences of children and families. As a result, the service would be better placed to make informed changes that improve outcomes for children.

A quality assurance calendar was in place and identified monthly activities and monitoring tasks. We highlighted the need to include greater detail within the calendar to provide a clearer focus for improvement activity. For example, where self-evaluation was identified, it was not always evident which aspect of practice, provision or Quality Indicator was being evaluated. Strengthening the detail within the calendar would support more purposeful monitoring, clearer accountability and a shared understanding of improvement priorities. This would help to evaluate the impact of improvement activities on outcomes for children.

Audit tools were used as part of the service's quality assurance processes to monitor practice, identify strengths and highlight areas for improvement. This supported ongoing self-evaluation and helped inform improvement planning. This enabled the service to evaluate the quality of provision and take action to enhance outcomes for children.

Policies and procedures were in place and reflected current best practice guidance and the principles of the UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child). This supported a rights-based approach and helped ensure children's wellbeing, inclusion and individual needs were considered in practice. As a result, children benefitted from an environment where their rights, safety and wellbeing were promoted and supported.

Risk assessments were in place and had been developed collaboratively by staff, supporting a shared

understanding of potential risks within the service. The service was further developing these using a risk-benefit approach to balance children's safety with opportunities for challenge, exploration and learning. This supported children to develop confidence, resilience and risk awareness through meaningful experiences and safe risk-taking.

Remits had been developed for all staff and clearly outlined individual roles and responsibilities. This supported staff to understand expectations, take ownership of specific areas of practice and contribute effectively to the service's improvement. Staff commented, "I'm very happy to work in such a lovely place. We are a jolly team & I hope that is reflected in our relationships with the children". As a result, children benefitted from an organised service where staff worked effectively together to support their care, learning and wellbeing.

Quality indicator: Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

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.

Staff were responsive to children and demonstrated a good understanding of when to sensitively join play and when to step back and allow children to lead their own learning. Due to the low numbers attending the service, staff were mindful of creating opportunities for children to engage independently and develop relationships with their peers. The service recognised this and was exploring opportunities to work more closely with other service's nurseries to provide additional social experiences for children. This supported children to experience a balance of responsive adult support and child-led play, promoting confidence, independence, social skills and sustained engagement in their learning.

Staff had regular opportunities to engage in weekly team meetings, where they reflected on practice, shared ideas and discussed training and professional learning. These meetings supported ongoing professional dialogue, collaborative working and a shared understanding of service priorities. We discussed further developing this approach through a structured meeting cycle that included self-evaluation, quality assurance and improvement planning. This would support a more structured approach to reflecting on practice, identifying areas for development and monitoring progress towards improvement priorities. This would enable continuous improvement activity remains focused on enhancing outcomes and experiences for children.

Staff had individual training records in place that detailed the professional learning opportunities they had undertaken and included reflection on their learning. This demonstrated a commitment to continuous professional development. We encouraged the service to strengthen this further by supporting staff to evaluate and record the impact of their learning on outcomes for children. This would help demonstrate how professional learning contributes to improvements in children's experiences, wellbeing and development.

Since the last inspection, the service had responded positively to staffing and deployment challenges by increasing staff hours. This helped ensure there were sufficient staff available to meet children's needs, maintain effective supervision and support the smooth running of the service. (See 'What the service has done to meet any improvements we made at or since the last inspection'.)

Management had recognised the need to implement the national induction resource for all staff and had plans in place to begin this work. This demonstrated a commitment to supporting staff to develop the knowledge, skills and values required for their role. The consistent use of the induction resource would help

ensure staff had a shared understanding of expectations and best practice, leading to more consistent experiences and improved outcomes for children.

Staff participated in annual professional development and review meetings, providing opportunities to reflect on practice, identify strengths and agree learning objectives. We discussed the benefit of introducing interim review meetings throughout the year to monitor progress against agreed objectives and provide ongoing support and challenge. This would enable staff and management to track professional growth more effectively, identify any barriers to progress and respond to development needs in a timely way. This would help ensure professional learning is embedded in practice and contributes to improved outcomes for children.

Children thrive and develop in quality spaces — 5 - Very Good

Quality indicator: Children experience high-quality facilities

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.

Play spaces were clearly defined and thoughtfully organised to support children's play, learning and development. The layout enabled children to move confidently between areas, make choices and engage in sustained play experiences. This supported children to lead their own learning and develop confidence, independence and decision-making skills.

The nursery environment was warm, welcoming and nurturing. Natural light and comfortable furnishings contributed to a calm, homely atmosphere where children appeared relaxed, secure and settled. Real and natural materials were available throughout the environment, encouraging curiosity, creativity and open-ended play. Children accessed a range of meaningful play opportunities that reflected their interests and supported their learning and development. Overall, the environment provided a positive space where children could explore, play and learn with confidence.

Since the last inspection, the management and staff team had worked hard to improve the setting. Staff spoke positively about these developments, with one staff member commenting, "I feel very proud to work in such a wonderful nursery setting. The commitment and dedication of the staff team is exceptional, and everyone works together to ensure that children receive the highest standard of care, nurture and support." Significant progress had been made in relation to children's safety and wellbeing, including the installation of alarmed door systems, enhanced gate security and improved signage. (See 'What the service has done to meet any improvements we made at or since the last inspection'.)

Children could move freely between the indoor and outdoor environments, making choices about where and how they played. Outdoors, children engaged in water play and transporting resources, demonstrating concentration, cooperation and problem-solving skills. Children also benefitted from daily outdoor play and regular forest visits, providing opportunities to explore and learn within natural environments. These experiences supported children's confidence, independence, resilience and physical development while encouraging curiosity and active learning.

The service had begun consulting with children, families and other stakeholders about the development of the outdoor environment. This demonstrated a commitment to ensuring future improvements reflected the needs, interests and aspirations of those using the service. We encouraged the service to continue this

collaborative approach and clearly evidence how feedback informed developments. This would help create an outdoor environment that is responsive to children's interests and supports positive outcomes in learning, wellbeing and development.

Children were given meaningful opportunities to contribute to decisions about the nursery environment, including the selection and purchase of resources. Staff sought and valued children's views, ensuring resources reflected their interests and preferences. This supported children to develop a sense of ownership, responsibility and belonging within the setting. This enabled children to influence their learning environment and access resources that were relevant, engaging and responsive to their interests and needs.

At the previous inspection, an area for improvement had been identified in relation to infection prevention and control. The service had taken appropriate action to address this and had implemented changes to practice in line with current guidance. This demonstrated a commitment to maintaining a safe, hygienic environment and responding positively to areas for development. This helped to reduce the risk of infection and supported children's health, safety and wellbeing.

Children play and learn 4 - Good

Quality indicator: Play learning and developing

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.

Children were happy, engaged and confident within the service. They interacted positively with staff and peers, independently accessed resources and participated in a range of play and learning experiences. Children led and extended their own learning, making choices and sustaining involvement in experiences that reflected their interests. As a result, children appeared settled, secure and motivated to explore their environment, supporting their wellbeing, confidence, independence and overall development.

Children led their own play and learning experiences. For example, children independently chose to make paper aeroplanes and then extended their learning by testing how far they could fly them outdoors. Staff responded effectively to children's interests, introducing opportunities to compare distances by marking where each aeroplane landed. This helped extend learning through play and supported children's understanding of early mathematical concepts. As a result, children experienced meaningful, child-led learning opportunities that promoted curiosity, problem-solving, critical thinking and sustained engagement in their learning.

Planning approaches took account of child-led, adult-led and adult-initiated experiences, providing a balanced and responsive curriculum. Evidence of planning was displayed within the playroom and subsequently captured within floorbooks, enabling learning experiences and children's engagement to be recorded over time. We discussed the importance of ensuring children's views and contributions were clearly visible within planning documentation, alongside links to areas of learning and identified next steps. This would strengthen the planning process, provide clearer evidence of progression and ensure children's voices remain central to their learning experiences.

Online learning journals were used to track children's progress and development over time. Staff identified learning possibilities for individual children and linked observations to support assessment and planning. We highlighted that some learning possibilities were broad and that there was limited evidence to demonstrate when children had achieved identified learning goals. We discussed the need for learning

possibilities to be more specific and measurable. This would support more effective tracking of children's progress, provide clearer evidence of achievement and help ensure learning is appropriately planned and evaluated over time.

Tracking and monitoring systems were in place; however, these had not yet been fully completed for the current term. Previously, targeted group interventions had been used to support children requiring additional support or challenge, and staff tracked children's progress throughout these interventions. This enabled staff to identify starting points, monitor progress and evaluate the impact of targeted support.

Children are supported to achieve — 5 - Very Good

Quality indicator: Nurturing care and support

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.

Overall, children experienced warm, nurturing care that promoted their wellbeing. They appeared happy, settled and confident within the service and benefitted from positive relationships with staff and their peers. Children were supported to feel safe, valued and included, contributing to positive experiences and outcomes throughout their day.

Personal plans were in place for all children and included information about their health, wellbeing and support needs. Families were involved in developing and reviewing plans, helping to ensure children's needs were understood and responded to effectively. The service had introduced care plan overviews and was developing a new personal plan format to improve accessibility and information sharing. We discussed the importance of including clear support strategies to promote consistency in practice.

Chronologies were in place for all children and recorded significant life events. Together, these approaches supported informed, responsive care and helped ensure children received personalised support that promoted their wellbeing and development.

Snack and lunchtime were relaxed, sociable experiences. Children demonstrated independence by making choices, collecting their own plates and cups, and self-serving food. Staff sat alongside children and engaged them in meaningful conversations, creating a positive dining experience. This supported children's independence, confidence, communication skills and social development while promoting their wellbeing.

Transitions were planned to meet the individual needs of children and families. Home visits helped staff build relationships and support children to settle confidently, with one parent describing the service as, "Informative, great communication, friendly and warm." Staff also worked closely with childminders and other professionals to support children attending split placements. This promoted continuity in children's care, learning and development and helped ensure smooth transitions.

Children's achievements were celebrated through a dedicated display that recognised and valued their successes, progress and contributions. Staff achievements were also included, helping to create a culture of recognition, pride and shared accomplishment across the service. This supported children's self-esteem and sense of belonging, while promoting positive relationships and a supportive learning community. As a result, children experienced an environment where achievement and effort were recognised and celebrated.

Community links were strong and well established. Children benefitted from a wide range of opportunities to engage with their local community, helping to broaden their experiences and develop a sense of belonging. The service demonstrated how these partnerships enhanced children's learning and confidence. This supported children to build positive relationships within their community and gain meaningful experiences that enriched their learning and social development.

Relationships with families were positive, meaningful and based on mutual respect. Parents spoke highly of the service, with one commenting, "It's the best nursery I've been at, and the staff are the best thing about it. Knowing I can trust them to reassure and nurture my child means a lot to me," while another shared, "It's a wonderful nurturing place." This reflected the confidence families had in the staff team and the quality of care provided. Strong partnerships between families and the service helped ensure children felt secure, valued and well supported in their learning and development.

During the inspection, no children were receiving medication. Medication records contained the information required to support safe administration, including prescribed dosages and recording arrangements. We discussed the potential benefits of storing medication requiring quick access within the playroom, where appropriate and in line with safe storage requirements. This would support a timely response to children's needs while maintaining effective supervision and continuity of care.

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

Requirements

Requirement 1

By 01 May 2026, the provider must ensure that children are kept safe and secure by implementing effective systems to prevent children leaving the service.

This should include but is not limited to:

a) ensuring the premises, are secure at all times
b) reviewing the security of gates leading into the school playground and nursery garden
c) ensuring children cannot enter the school unaccompanied by an adult
d) undertake a review of risk assessments ensuring they strengthen security and are effective in reducing risk.

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 31 March 2026.

Action taken on previous requirement

Risk assessments were in place and had been reviewed annually to support children's health, safety and wellbeing. A risk-benefit approach had been adopted in some areas of practice, and we encouraged the service to extend this approach across all risk assessments to promote a consistent balance between children's safety and opportunities for challenge, exploration and learning.

Since the previous inspection, significant work had been undertaken to strengthen children's safety and wellbeing. The service had implemented a detailed action plan that clearly identified actions taken, progress made and areas for ongoing review. This demonstrated a strong commitment to addressing identified issues and improving outcomes for children.

Security measures had been introduced, including alarm systems at the nursery and school entrances to prevent children from leaving the building unaccompanied. Alarmed doors were also in place within the nursery playroom. Additional locks had been fitted to all gates, alongside clear signage reminding service users to ensure gates were closed securely. These measures helped to create a safe and secure environment for children.

Children demonstrated an awareness of the systems in place to keep them safe. For example, one child asked, "Is the door alarmed?", demonstrating their understanding of the safety procedures within the playroom environment.

SIMOA (Keeping children Safe campaign) had been introduced with children and was visible within the playroom, helping to promote children's understanding of safety expectations and supporting a positive culture of wellbeing and responsibility.

Met - within timescales

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 are safe, supervised and receive high quality experiences at all times, the provider and manager should, as a minimum, review and make appropriate changes to staff deployment.

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

'My needs are met by the right number of people' (HSCS 3.15).

This area for improvement was made on 31 March 2026.

Action taken since then

Additional staffing hours had been allocated to the service to strengthen staff deployment and support children's safety, wellbeing and learning. This enabled children to move more freely between the indoor and outdoor environments while ensuring staff were available to support children with toileting needs when required.

Staff rotas were in place and provided clear oversight of deployment throughout the day, helping to ensure appropriate staffing levels were maintained across session.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

To keep children safe and healthy, the manager and staff should ensure that effective infection prevention and control practices and routines are in place and consistently practiced.

This includes but is not limited to, ensuring that:

a) children are supported so their handwashing routines are effective and following infection prevention and control guidance
b) the toilet door is closed
c) spare clothes are kept in lidded boxes
d) staff are knowledgeable and competent about all aspects of infection prevention and control.

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 area for improvement was made on 31 March 2026.

Action taken since then

A bathroom risk assessment was in place, the toilet door remained closed during use, and frosting had been installed on the main entrance door to enhance privacy. Spare clothing was stored in individual boxes with lids, helping to reduce the risk of cross-contamination.

Staff had also completed an Early Learning and Childcare nappy changing audit on 24 August 2026 in line with Care Inspectorate nappy changing guidance. This demonstrated the service's commitment to reviewing practice and ensuring procedures reflected current best practice.

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.scot.

Detailed evaluations

Leadership	4 - Good
Leadership and management of staff and resources	4 - Good
Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment	5 - Very Good

Children thrive and develop in quality spaces	5 - Very Good
Children experience high quality spaces	5 - Very 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

To find out more

This inspection report is published by the Care Inspectorate. You can download this report and others from our website.

Care services in Scotland cannot operate unless they are registered with the Care Inspectorate. We inspect, award grades and help services to improve. We also investigate complaints about care services and can take action when things aren't good enough.

Please get in touch with us if you would like more information or have any concerns about a care service.

You can also read more about our work online at www.careinspectorate.scot

Contact us

Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

enquiries@careinspectorate.gov.scot

0345 600 9527

Find us on Facebook

Twitter: @careinspect

Other languages and formats

This report is available in other languages and formats on request.

Tha am foillseachadh seo ri fhaighinn ann an cruthannan is cànain eile ma nithear iarrtas.

অনুরোধসাপেক্ষে এই প্রকাশনাটি অন্য ফরম্যাট এবং অন্যান্য ভাষায় পাওয়া যায়।

یہ اشاعت درخواست کرنے پر دیگر شکلوں اور دیگر زبانوں میں فراہم کی جاسکتی ہے۔

ਬੇਨਤੀ 'ਤੇ ਇਹ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਨ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਹੋਰਨਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਉਪਲਬਧ ਹੈ।

هذه الوثيقة متوفرة بلغات ونماذج أخرى عند الطلب

本出版品有其他格式和其他語言備索。

Na życzenie niniejsza publikacja dostępna jest także w innych formatach oraz językach.