Gilmerton Early Years Centre
Day Care of Children

66 Gilmerton Dykes Street
Edinburgh
EH17 8PL

Telephone: 01316 641 202

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
7 March 2025

Service provided by:
City of Edinburgh Council

Service provider number:
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CS2003015642

About the service

Gilmerton Early Years Centre is registered to provide care to a maximum of 62 children aged 0 - 5 years at any time.

Care is provided from a single storey property located within the Gilmerton area of Edinburgh. Children are accommodated within four playrooms and have access to outdoor spaces. The service is close to shops, schools, transport routes and other amenities.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection type which took place on Wednesday 5 March 2025 between 09:30 and 16:00 and Thursday 6 March 2025 between 09:15 and 15:15. The 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 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
- received nine on line questionnaires from families using the setting
- spoke with staff and management
- received three on line questionnaires from staff
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Children were happy and engaged in their play and actively led their learning.
- Staff knew children very well and worked closely with families to provide tailored support that met children's individual needs.
- Staff worked in partnership with outside professionals to improve outcomes for children when they needed additional support.
- The outdoor play area provided children with valuable opportunities to play and learn in a natural environment.
- Staff worked well as a team, creating positive outcomes for children.
- Management inspired staff, empowering them to be their best and deliver high quality care, play and learning experiences.

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?	5 - Very 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 found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

Quality indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support

Children received warm, caring and nurturing approaches from staff, which supported their overall wellbeing. We observed gentle and loving interactions between staff and children with lots of cuddles and praise. When one child received a t-shirt with their favourite character, it brought them immense joy, making them feel seen and valued. Such small, thoughtful actions had a significant impact, fostering a positive emotional connection and enhancing the child's sense of happiness and security in the setting.

Children's overall wellbeing was supported through effective use of personal planning, taking account of the wellbeing indicators. Children and families were central to this process ensuring effective information sharing which was used by staff to promote consistency and continuity of care. Speaking with staff revealed how they understood each child's unique needs and how they tailored their support accordingly. We heard of instances of individual children's progress, achieved through a targeted and personalised approach that encouraged staff to think creatively about how to best support each child. Additionally, the use of sign, object and song signifiers was highlighted as a key tool in helping all children communicate effectively. Staff shared that consistently incorporating these methods throughout the setting ensured smoother transitions and improved communication for all children.

Family engagement was important to the setting. Staff carried out home visits when children were new to the setting, which helped build strong relationships from the start. Staff explained how these visits provided them with a deeper understanding of the child's home environment, routines and individual needs. It also helped families feel more comfortable and supported, fostering a sense of trust and partnership between home and the setting. Parents were warmly invited into the setting at drop off and pick up and we observed supportive and enabling conversations between staff and families. Regular, planned and spontaneous, stay and play sessions offered parents a meaningful opportunity to engage with the setting and see their child actively participating in experiences, such as planting and exploring the outdoor space. This involvement not only enhanced the setting but also allowed parents to feel connected to their child's learning environment.

Through the responses to our questionnaire, parents consistently praised staff for their friendly and supportive approach, highlighting how they went above and beyond to assist both them and their children. One parent shared how they regularly received updates on their child's development, with personal plans being clearly explained and any concerns addressed. Another parent noted how the skills and techniques used at the nursery were successfully applied at home, aiding their child's progress. Several parents expressed deep gratitude, especially for the positive impact the nursery had on their child's development and wellbeing. One parent emphasised how their child looked forward to attending, enjoying the time spent with friends and teachers and felt incredibly supported. These comments reflected the strong, caring relationships and professional practice that staff maintained, which significantly contributed to children's wellbeing and overall development.

Staff shared with us the collaborative work they carried out with other professionals, often helping families reach out to services that could support the needs of the whole family.

One initiative was having a speech and language therapist present during stay and play sessions, offering support and advice in a relaxed and approachable manner. This helped create an inclusive, empowering atmosphere where families could feel more confident in seeking help and integrating new strategies into their daily lives.

Children enjoyed mealtimes in a calm, unhurried environment that fostered a positive and social experience. Staff recognised daily routines as valuable opportunities to build strong attachments with children. During meals, staff remained attentive and responsive, ensuring they could act quickly in the event of an emergency, such as choking. The food provided was nutritious and catered to each child's cultural and dietary needs. Fresh water was readily available throughout the day, with children encouraged to stay hydrated.

The efforts to promote independence within the setting had been successful. Even the youngest children were seen feeding themselves and older children independently washing their hands, self-serving at meals, hanging up their coats and confidently moving between indoors and out. However, there were occasional instances where staff needed to remember children's capabilities and the importance of stepping back to allow them to complete tasks independently. For example, at times, children were managing tasks on their own, but with the best intentions, staff still cautioned them with phrases like "be careful" or "watch where you're going," even when children were capable and confident in the task at hand. Encouraging staff to allow children more time to practice and develop new skills before stepping in would further nurture their independence and boost their confidence.

Quality indicator 1.3: play and learning

Staff took on a variety of roles in playrooms to support and extend children's play experiences. For example, staff were invited into children's play, they facilitated play opportunities and extended learning through their interactions. This contributed to the positive, trusting relationships that had been built and supported children to thrive.

Staff used 'focus stories' as a tool to promote and support language and literacy development. With pride, staff shared the progress children had made in their ability to recall and engage with stories, highlighting the clear benefits of this approach. In a floor book, children's drawings, mark making and voices, scribed by staff, illustrated their growing understanding and progression. These focus stories not only fostered playful literacy development but also nurtured engagement with language, encouraging children to express their ideas and feelings in a meaningful way.

Planning was child-centred, building on children's interests, such as under the sea and worms to create meaningful and engaging learning experiences. A balance of responsive and intentional approaches ensured children were motivated and actively involved in their play. This was further confirmed by a staff member who shared, "We always provide core provision and provide provocation but also work on responding to the children's needs, ideas and suggestions". Floor books were used to document children's interests, capture their voices and reflect on their learning journey, including identifying next steps to extend their thinking. Through their interactions, staff nurtured children's curiosity, encouraging them to share their thoughts, express their ideas, and explore what they wanted to learn next. This ensured learning experiences remained relevant, engaging and supported children's motivation to achieve.

The setting had recently reverted back to using paper learning journals to record children's progress and learning. Staff shared this change had brought several benefits, for example these physical records encouraged deeper engagement, as they could be revisited, added to and cherished, creating a lasting record of each child's journey.

Within children's learning journals and personal plans, we observed connections between children's individual needs and how staff met these through tailored support. Staff tracked each child's progress by documenting their experiences and interactions. This ensured that the experiences and opportunities provided were designed to help children reach their full potential with milestones that were personal to them.

Through our on line questionnaires, families expressed high levels of satisfaction with the play and learning experiences on offer, particularly the outdoor activities that their children enjoyed. Many shared how their children loved spending time in the garden, exploring nature and engaging in activities like digging for worms, playing on swings and learning about insects and flowers. One parent highlighted how their child's confidence and speech had greatly improved through these outdoor experiences. Others mentioned their child's enjoyment of arts and crafts in the outdoors, as well as the opportunity to engage in activities like obstacle building, flower planting and playing games outside. Overall, families praised the setting's focus on providing a variety of enriching outdoor experiences that fostered both learning and fun, with many children regularly enjoying the outdoor space and forming strong connections with nature.

How good is our setting? 5 - Very Good

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

Quality indicator 2.2: Children experience high quality facilities

Since the last inspection, a considerable amount of work has gone into creating a calm, nurturing space where children could truly thrive. Staff had dedicated much of their own time and effort to ensuring they created an environment that supported children's emotional wellbeing and development. Thoughtful touches, such as soft lighting and cosy spaces, played a key role in helping children self-regulate, feel secure and fully engage in play and learning. As a result, children not only benefited from a sense of comfort and stability but also experienced fun, confidence and a connect with the setting.

Children thrived in a safe, secure and well-maintained environment that supported their wellbeing and development. The playrooms were spacious, bright and airy, providing an inviting atmosphere for exploration. With direct access to the outdoors available throughout the day, children had plenty opportunities for active play and connection with nature. Infection prevention and control practices ensured the setting remained clean, offering children a healthy space in which to learn, play and grow.

Children had access to a fun, challenging and natural outdoor space called the 'top garden'. They had the freedom to run, hide, swing, climb, and take risks, building confidence and physical skills. They could engage in imaginative role play in the outdoor kitchen, have snack outdoors in all weathers, construct with loose parts to develop creativity and problem-solving abilities or connect with nature by planting and caring for living things. For those seeking rest, the hammock provided a space to relax and listen to the world around them, fostering mindfulness and a sense of wellbeing. This rich environment supported children's independence, resilience and holistic development through self-directed play and exploration.

The next focus will be on the lower gardens to extend and enrich children's experiences in a space that was directly off the playrooms.

The manager shared plans for a new pushchair and bike store, aimed at promoting cycling to nursery. Additionally, they outlined plans for a clothing bank to be established in the outdoor cabin at the front of the setting. This initiative would offer families easy and discrete access to clothing, allowing them to take what they needed while also providing an opportunity to donate items and support the wider community. This thoughtful approach fostered a sense of shared responsibility and helped build a supportive, inclusive environment for all.

How good is our leadership? 5 - Very Good

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

Quality indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well

The setting had undergone change, with a significant shift in the staff team, resulting in what was almost an entirely new team. This transition brought challenges, as existing staff needed reassurance and support, while new staff required careful induction into the setting's ethos and expectations. Through this period of transition, with the support of senior staff, the manager remained committed to building a strong team, focused on providing the best outcomes for children and families. This approach ensured that the setting moved forward while promoting a supportive and collaborative atmosphere in the team. Demonstrating a commitment to supporting staff in their role, a staff member told us, "My senior leadership team challenges me and this supports my development and they inspire me to be my best, although none of that would be possible without being secure in the knowledge that they genuinely care about their staff".

Since taking up the post, with support from senior staff, the manager had been involved in playrooms, actively mentoring staff and modelling good practice. This had strengthened the basic standards of care, which then served as a foundation for further improvement. Management observations of staff practices were carried out to ensure children's needs were met and that improvements were made where necessary. Actions such as peer reviews, where staff provided feedback on each other's practice had become a regular part of the setting. Looking ahead, management aimed to further empower staff to thrive within their teams by fostering a sense of ownership and confidence in their roles, while providing support as needed.

The use of floor books and wall displays, prominently displayed in the hall for everyone to see, played a key role in driving improvements, particularly in areas such as outdoor play development. These displays provided a platform for everyone to be involved and have a voice in the developments, creating a sense of shared ownership. By visually linking these improvements to best practice, the displays helped to highlight the ongoing progress and made it clear how changes were positively impacting the setting. This approach not only encouraged transparency but also reinforced a culture of collaboration, where everyone could see how their contributions were shaping the environment and the children's experiences.

Staff reflected well together and used these reflections to bring about positive change to outcomes for children and families. Management promoted and sustained a shared vision for the setting that reflected the aspirations of children, families and the wider community. This helped all staff know what was important for the setting to meet the needs of children and families.

The responses to our questionnaire reflected a high level of satisfaction with the setting, with all families expressing that they were happy and almost all saw no need for improvements. One parent suggested more parent days, but overall, feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with comments such as "It's already better" and "Nothing to be changed." All nine families strongly agreed with statements such as having a strong connection with the staff, feeling involved in a meaningful way in the service's development and being satisfied with the care and support their child received. This high level of satisfaction indicated a strong partnership approach, where families felt valued and engaged. Such collaboration between families and staff fostered a supportive and responsive environment, enhancing the overall experience for children and their families.

How good is our staff team? 5 - Very Good

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

Quality indicator 4.3: Staff deployment

Staff communicated with each other and children regarding their movements within the spaces, including when they were leaving. This practice not only ensured appropriate staffing levels but also reassured children that key staff would return, promoting a sense of security and trust in their relationships. Staff were at ease with children moving between indoors and out with no impact on children's freedom of movement. Consequently, children experienced stability, effective supervision and quality engagement from staff who worked well together.

In our questionnaire, families praised staff for being friendly, approachable and always willing to help. They appreciated the consistency of familiar staff members, which provided stability for children and their families. Many families felt that staff went above and beyond to support them, particularly during challenging times. There was recognition of the strong relationships staff had built with both children and families, with many noting that their children spoke fondly of the staff. Families also valued the professionalism and dedication of the team, highlighting their confidence and pride in their work. The staff's dedication to engaging with families and maintaining consistent care had helped foster children's emotional wellbeing, confidence and overall development.

The setting used the Early learning and childcare: national induction resource (Scottish Government, 2023) resource and a staff member told us, "Through induction and mentoring, I receive support to adapt to my job and perform my work effectively". The next step was to personalise the induction process to better align with the unique needs of the setting. This tailored approach would ensure that new staff members were introduced to the specific values, routines and expectations of the setting, fostering a better understanding of their roles.

Staff discussed the rotation of play and learning area responsibilities and how moving to a monthly rotation had allowed for deeper learning opportunities for the children. They told us change not only helped children build stronger, more sustained connections with different learning areas but also provided staff with the chance to develop a more in-depth understanding of each area. It also promoted collaboration and shared responsibility, helping to strengthen team dynamics.

Staff took on leadership roles that allowed them to take ownership of specific areas, which contributed to both their professional development and the children's experiences.

For instance, one staff member led a focused story group, and the floor book created for this activity linked to best practice, demonstrating how these frameworks guided and informed their practice. This approach deepened staff's understanding of quality standards and promoted consistency in their work. Two staff members were responsible for outdoor learning and offering enriching experiences for the children. They had also began to share their learning with colleagues, fostering a collaborative environment where staff learned from each other. These leadership roles empowered staff to take initiative and further enrich the children's play and learning.

Staff were proud of their setting which shone through in their confidence and keenness to tell us about their work. Staff told us they felt part of a welcoming team where everyone brought different skills and collaborated effectively. They praised the manager for being approachable and maintaining an open-door policy. There was recognition of the manager's bravery in seeking feedback and using this is improve their own practice. Staff felt supported in their professional growth, learning from one another and they highlighted the strong relationships built with families. While they acknowledged these strengths, they also expressed a desire for more formal one to one meetings, which the manager also recognised and had already put in place.

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 promote children's privacy and dignity, the provider should improve the toilet arrangements for children. This should be done in line with current best practice guidance.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that 'If I require intimate personal care, this is carried out in a dignified way, with my privacy and personal preferences respected' (HSCS 1.4).

This area for improvement was made on 13 September 2023.

Action taken since then

The provider had taken the appropriate action and children had access to toileting facilities that promoted their privacy and dignity.

Therefore this area for improvement had been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

To improve outcomes for children, quality assurance systems should be strengthened to ensure they are robust and lead to improvement. This includes but is not limited to staff being fully involved in self-evaluation processes and developing the content of staff meetings.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that 'I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes.'(HSCS 4.19).

This area for improvement was made on 13 September 2023.

Action taken since then

As illustrated in quality indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well, outcomes for children had increased because staff were involved in self-evaluation processes. This meant quality assurance systems lead to improvement.

Therefore this area for improvement had 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?	5 - Very Good
4.3 Staff deployment	5 - Very Good

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Contact us

Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

enquiries@careinspectorate.com

0345 600 9527

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