Cortachy Pre School Class
Day Care of Children

Cortachy Primary School
Cortachy
Kirriemuir
DD8 4LX

Telephone: 01575 540 217

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
22 May 2026

Service provided by:
Angus Council

Service provider number:
SP2003000043

Service no:
CS2003015774

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About the service

Cortachy Pre School Class provides a daycare of children service to a maximum of 10 children at any one time aged 3 to not yet attending primary school. There were 7 children attending on the day of inspection. The service is provided by Angus Council in a rural area in Kirriemuir. It operates from a playroom within a school. The playroom has direct access to outdoors.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place between 21 May 2026 between 09:00 and 17:00. 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 seven with young people using the service
- received one completed questionnaires from families using the service
- spoke with five families during the inspection
- spoke with two staff and the Manager
- 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

- Staff knew children very well and used this knowledge to provide responsive, consistent support, helping children feel secure, supported and able to make meaningful progress.
- Literacy and numeracy were embedded to a very high standard across the setting, with children developing strong skills through meaningful play experiences
- Children were progressing very well and applied their learning confidently and independently.
- Children benefited from clear, personalised next steps in learning, which were matched to their stage of development and informed by skilled observation.
- Children were active participants in this process and confidently talked about their goals and achievements, which supported very strong progress.
- Staff interactions were highly skilled and supported children's learning very effectively, using open-ended questions and sustained shared thinking to deepen children's learning and creativity.

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

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

Leadership 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.

The setting was highly committed to a vision that reflected high standards for children and families. It demonstrated clear and well-established vision, values and aims which had been thoughtfully co-constructed with children, families and staff. This inclusive approach ensured the values were meaningful, well understood and consistently reflected in practice, with a strong emphasis on kindness, safety and achievement.

Children and families actively contributed to shaping the ethos of the setting and their views and values were respected. The setting embedded its vision and values well, with staff treating children as equal partners and prioritising their wellbeing. One family told us 'the nursery is remarkable, they love the children - I have never seen anything like the togetherness and community feel'.

The service promoted a culture where everyone felt confident and shared responsibility for making changes and sustaining improvement. This approach helped the service meet the needs of the nursery community and ensured children, families and staff were included.
The service demonstrated a strong commitment to continuous improvement through well-embedded self-evaluation and quality assurance processes.

Staff engaged in regular reflection and professional dialogue to review practice, environments and children's experiences, and used this effectively to shape meaningful improvement. For example, staff led specific areas of development such as literacy, reading schools, word aware and storytelling. They gathered evidence through floor books, and feedback from the people who use the service to evaluate the impact of changes and identify next steps. As a result, children benefited from more engaging, relevant and purposeful experiences which supported their progress and wellbeing.

A clear quality assurance calendar and robust systems to monitor and audit practice were in place. These outlined actions, timescales and responsibilities across daily, monthly and termly activities. This included monitoring of health and safety, safeguarding, infection prevention and control, and learning experiences. The calendar was used well as a working document and was reviewed regularly to remain relevant and responsive. This supported consistency and accountability across the setting, helped leaders identify areas for development promptly, and ensured that children benefited from safe, well-organised and improving experiences.

The setting promoted a supportive and inclusive culture where individuals felt valued, respected and listened to. Leaders were approachable and nurturing, with an open-door policy and regular professional discussions supporting wellbeing and practice development. 'One family told us this is a fantastic nursery, its special'.

Children play and learn 6 - Excellent

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

Children were highly engaged, motivated and deeply involved in their play and learning. They confidently led their own learning through exceptionally well-considered indoor and outdoor environments, demonstrating curiosity, independence and sustained concentration over extended periods. Children made purposeful choices, initiated ideas and remained fully absorbed as they explored, developed and extended their learning. This resulted in highly positive outcomes for children.

Children participated in rich, highly meaningful literacy experiences that were skilfully woven through play. They created and told their own stories, developed characters, wrote their own books and independently accessed stories using QR codes. As a result, children developed confidence in expressing their ideas, used language creatively, and showed enthusiasm, pride and enjoyment in reading and writing. They were motivated to share stories, make marks with purpose and see themselves as capable readers, writers and storytellers.

Numeracy was embedded to a very high standard across practice. Children applied their understanding of money, pattern and counting across a wide range of meaningful contexts, demonstrating depth, confidence and accuracy in their learning. They used numeracy naturally and competently in play and everyday experiences, reflecting strong progression over time. One family told us 'The learning they do is great, they are amazing with number, letters and shapes'. As a result, children were progressing very well in numeracy and were confident in applying their skills accurately and independently.

Staff used a range of highly effective interaction strategies, including open-ended questioning, sustained shared thinking and prompts such as "I wonder". This deepened children's thinking and curiosity and extended experiences that grew from children's interests. These approaches were used naturally and skilfully, enabling children to explore ideas, make connections and develop their thinking and creativity. Interactions were consistently well paced and sharply focused on extending learning and promoting outstanding engagement.

Children were treated as capable and equal partners in their learning. Staff demonstrated very high aspirations for all children. Children's ideas were consistently respected and valued, creating a learning environment that was inclusive, empowering and aspirational. This supported children to thrive as confident, capable learners and contributed to highly positive outcomes.

A highly effective and well-established approach to supporting children's play, learning and development was evident. Systems and approaches to identifying and implementing next steps were deeply embedded in practice and reflected a responsive, child-centred ethos. Each child benefited from clear, personalised and meaningful next steps, matched to their stage of development and informed by skilled observation. Children were active participants in their learning and confidently talked about their learning goals and achievements. This contributed to children making very strong progress.

The service fostered a culture of shared ownership of learning, enabling children to recognise and celebrate their progress. For example, children confidently talked about their interests, goals and achievements. This meant children took pride in their successes and demonstrated curiosity and drive to achieve. This had a highly positive impact on children's self-awareness and understanding of their learning.

Children are supported to achieve — 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.

Children experienced consistent, warm, nurturing and responsive care. Staff knew children well and used this knowledge to provide sensitive, personalised support that promoted wellbeing and a strong sense of security. One family told us 'They know my child so well and what [they] need without me having to say it. They just know'.

Relationships between staff and children were positive, respectful and trusting. Staff responded calmly and thoughtfully to children's emotions, helping them to understand and manage their feelings. For example, when children experienced conflict or became upset, staff used skilful, nurturing strategies such as offering alternative roles, allowing time and space, and revisiting situations to support reflection and learning. This supported children to develop emotional resilience, empathy and self-regulation. One family expressed 'Staff are doing a wonderful job they are so gentle with the children, they offer cuddles and can rest when they want to'.

Children's rights were embedded in everyday practice through the use of meaningful discussions to help children understand concepts such as privacy, safety, and kindness. For example, staff used stories, daily conversations and real-life situations to help children think about taking turns, respecting personal space and being kind to others. As a result, children demonstrated a clear understanding of these principles and were supported to apply them in real-life situations.

Mealtimes were unhurried, respectful and child-led, supporting both independence and wellbeing. These experiences were relaxed and allowed children to choose what to eat, serve themselves, engage in meaningful conversations and take responsibility for tidying up. This promoted independence, communication and essential life skills.

Children were supported to develop an understanding of safety and risk through a variety of approaches that were carefully adapted to suit their stage of development. For example, staff used tools such as the "safe elephant" during outings, alongside visual supports for sun safety and UV awareness, to help make key messages accessible and meaningful. As a result, children were able to confidently discuss how to keep themselves safe and apply this knowledge in practice.

Staff demonstrated a responsive approach to meeting children's individual needs through their knowledge of each child's needs strengths and stage of development. This enabled them to provide meaningful, targeted support during everyday experiences, using consistent strategies to support development, such as acknowledging children's feelings, modelling appropriate language and helping them to express and regulate their emotions. Strong partnerships with families underpinned this approach, ensuring continuity and consistency between home and the setting. This approach meant that children experienced consistent, high-quality support and made meaningful progress.

Families were actively involved in nursery life through events and contributions to the environment, while also engaging in home learning through literacy initiatives and digital platforms. Staff involved families in decision-making, helping them feel valued and included. This meant children experienced a strong sense of belonging, and consistency between home and nursery. One family explained 'It's the staff here that make this nursery amazing, the staff are fantastic - they don't miss a thing. Communication is amazing'.

Complaints

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

Detailed evaluations

Leadership	5 - Very Good
Leadership and management of staff and resources	5 - Very Good

Children play and learn	6 - Excellent
Playing, learning and developing	6 - Excellent

Children are supported to achieve	5 - Very Good
Nurturing care and support	5 - Very Good

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