Elderbank Early Years
Day Care of Children

St.Kilda Bank
Broomlands
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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
16 September 2026

Service provided by:
North Ayrshire Council

Service provider number:
SP2003003327

Service no:
CS2003016026

About the service

The service is provided by North Ayrshire Council and is located within the Elderbank Primary School campus in a residential area of Irvine, North Ayrshire. The early years service operates from a designated area within the primary school and benefits from a separate entrance for children and families.

The service is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 50 children aged three years to those not yet attending primary school.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 15 and 16 September 2026. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate.

There were 23 children present on the first day of our inspection, and 18 on the second day.

To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included, registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence. In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with children using the service
- received electronic feedback from six families whose children attended the service
- received electronic feedback from three staff who worked in the service
- spoke with staff and management
- 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.

Key messages

- Children benefited from warm, nurturing relationships and highly responsive support, helping them feel safe, included and confident in their learning and development.
- Strong partnership working supported positive outcomes for children and families.
- Further improvement was needed to strengthen personal planning and mealtime experiences so that support is consistently tailored to children's individual needs.
- Children benefited from a rich and stimulating learning environment, with high-quality indoor and outdoor experiences that promoted curiosity, confidence, independence and enjoyment.
- Strengthening assessment and planning processes would help better demonstrate children's progress and the impact of learning experiences over time.
- Leadership capacity had strengthened during a period of significant change, resulting in a more stable service with a clear commitment to improvement and better outcomes for children.
- Self-evaluation and quality assurance processes were developing positively; however, greater consistency in auditing, induction and children's participation in decision-making is needed to maximise their impact.

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 play and learn	4 - Good
Children are supported to achieve	4 - 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 had experienced a period of significant change and was continuing to adapt to a revised operating model. Changes within the staff team, alongside the recent appointment of an early years manager, had strengthened leadership capacity and created a more stable platform for improvement. While the pace of progress had been affected during this transition period, leaders demonstrated a clear understanding of the areas requiring further development and were beginning to establish more effective systems to support quality assurance and staff practice. As a result, the service was better positioned to support improvement and improve outcomes for children. One parent who provided written feedback commented positively about this saying, "Staff are great and the new management structure seems to be working better for the early years".

The nursery operated within the wider school's vision, values and aims. While these provided an overarching direction for the service, they did not fully reflect the unique identity, strengths and aspirations of the nursery community. A more nursery-specific set of vision, values and aims, reviewed regularly with children, families and staff, would further strengthen shared ownership and ensure that improvement activity remained focused on outcomes that mattered most to children.

Staff worked collaboratively and communicated effectively throughout the inspection. They consistently informed colleagues when moving between areas and made effective use of walkie talkies to maintain oversight across the service. This contributed positively to children's safety and ensured staff deployment remained responsive to children's needs.

There was a positive ethos of teamwork across the service. Team meetings created valuable opportunities for professional dialogue, reflection and shared decision-making. Staff engaged in discussions about planning approaches, learning environments and leadership responsibilities, demonstrating a commitment to improving practice and experiences for children.

Several staff had joined the service in August 2026. Although arrangements were in place to support them, induction processes lacked the structure and consistency that a formal mentoring system would provide. This limited opportunities for new staff to receive regular guidance and challenge as they became familiar with their role. The early years manager had identified this gap and had taken positive steps to strengthen support through individual meetings, induction reviews and reflective discussions. New staff had access to a staff handbook and national induction materials; however, stronger implementation and understanding of national induction guidance would further support staff confidence, consistency of practice and ultimately improve experiences for children.

The service demonstrated a clear commitment to continuous improvement through a focused and purposeful improvement plan. Priorities for development were relevant and linked to enhancing children's experiences. Despite recent changes within the service, there was evidence of sustained progress in some areas, including the continuation of Bookbug sessions, a lending library and increased opportunities for open-ended play. These initiatives enhanced children's access to literacy experiences, supported creativity and promoted curiosity and independent learning.

Self-evaluation processes were developing and reflected a commitment to reflective practice. Staff and parents were actively involved in consultation and improvement activities, with their views informing changes within the service. For example, parental feedback directly influenced the introduction of winter walks, increasing opportunities for outdoor learning and family engagement. Staff demonstrated a realistic and reflective approach to evaluating practice and showed an awareness of both strengths and areas requiring improvement.

Children's views were evident within planning and play experiences; however, opportunities to involve children more meaningfully in formal consultation and decision-making processes had not yet been fully maximised. Greater participation would help ensure children had a stronger influence on decisions affecting their experiences.

A range of quality assurance activities had been introduced, including monitoring of medication, accidents and incidents, personal plans and learning journals. These processes demonstrated an increased focus on oversight and accountability and supported the identification of improvement priorities. However, the impact of some auditing activities was reduced by inconsistencies in implementation. In particular, medication audits had not always been completed in line with the service's own procedures, including missed review periods within sampled records. More robust and consistent auditing would strengthen oversight, improve accountability and provide greater confidence that children were receiving safe and appropriate support.

Children play and learn 4 - Good

Quality indicator: Playing, 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.

We observed children having lots of fun within the setting. They accessed a stimulating learning environment, both indoors and outdoors, which supported a range of learning opportunities.

Many children chose to play outdoors for extended periods, engaging in experiences that promoted physical skills, confidence and independence. Opportunities to explore natural spaces and prepare for woodland visits helped children develop their understanding of the world around them.

Parents who provided feedback were very happy with the types of experiences and learning opportunities their children had indoors and outdoors at the setting. Some of their comments included:

"There is always lots of experiences set up to extend his learning. The nursery has also put in a lot of family sessions that have been great to be involved in and given my son great experiences. We've been on wellness walks, trips to the woods, trips to the library, stay and plays, book bug and breakfast clubs. The nursery have also taken my son on trips to the local country park and beach." and "He has the opportunity to extend his gross motor skills in the garden by playing on the bikes, balancing on the wooden beams, climbing and running around. My son has been to the wooded area near the school numerous times and has been on walks around the local community. He has visited the local country park and beach."

The setting provided opportunities for literacy, numeracy and problem-solving through play. Children were observed investigating, asking questions and exploring their ideas. Most children were engaged in their play and learning and demonstrated enjoyment in their chosen experiences.

Children's communication and language development was supported through conversations with staff and peers. Children shared experiences, contributed ideas and engaged in imaginative discussions. Staff listened attentively and encouraged children to express their thoughts, helping to build confidence and vocabulary. In the cosy cove, staff used questioning and conversation to extend children's learning and language. Children explored concepts such as light and shadow. Staff encouraged children to describe what they observed and consider different outcomes. These interactions supported children's developing communication, thinking and early mathematical skills.

Observations recorded children's participation and interests; however, their quality was inconsistent. Most observations focused on describing activities rather than analysing learning or identifying progress. Next steps were not always clear or meaningful, and there was limited evidence that observations were routinely used to inform future planning. As a result, it was difficult to demonstrate how experiences were supporting children's ongoing learning and development.

Although staff demonstrated knowledge of children's interests and needs, planning and assessment systems were not yet sufficiently developed to consistently evidence learning, progress and outcomes. This limited the service's ability to demonstrate the impact of experiences, interventions and support strategies on children's development over time.

Children are supported to achieve — 4 - Good

Quality indicator: Nurturing care and support

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 experienced warm, nurturing care from staff who were kind, gentle and responsive. Staff had developed positive relationships with children and demonstrated an understanding of their individual personalities, preferences and support needs. Interactions were respectful and caring, helping children feel secure, valued and confident within the setting. Staff responded sensitively to both verbal and non-verbal communication, ensuring that children who experienced barriers to communication were listened to and understood. As a result, children were supported to express themselves, make choices and engage more fully in their play and daily experiences. Parents who provided written feedback commented very positively about the care they and their children received from staff. Some of their comments included; "The staff make this nursery amazing. You see the bond they develop, the care they take in every single detail." and "The staff are absolutely fantastic.

Every single one of them are so amazing and friendly and there is no worries leaving them which is a huge thing as a mother. I have never trusted anyone like I do with the staff in their nursery."

Effective use of visual supports, including objects of reference and pictorial routines, helped children navigate their day and increased their independence. Children were observed confidently using these supports to understand expectations and manage transitions. Staff recognised and reinforced these achievements through positive encouragement, which promoted children's confidence, participation and sense of success.

The service demonstrated a commitment to meeting the wider needs of children and families through effective partnership working. Staff had established positive relationships with health, social work and other professionals and were confident in accessing support when required. This collaborative approach helped ensure that children and families received timely and appropriate support. This contributed to children's wellbeing, safety and development.

Children's wellbeing was further supported through robust safeguarding arrangements. Clear leadership and oversight of child protection processes were in place, and staff demonstrated a good understanding of their responsibilities. Training had strengthened staff confidence in recognising and responding to concerns, and practice reflected this learning. We saw evidence of prompt and appropriate action being taken when concerns arose about a child's wellbeing, demonstrating a strong commitment to keeping children safe and protected.

Mealtimes generally reflected the nurturing ethos of the service and took account of the complex and diverse needs of many children attending. Staff showed a good awareness of children's individual preferences, sensory needs and emotional wellbeing, adapting their approaches to help children engage positively with the lunchtime routine. Children who required additional support benefited from calm, patient and responsive interactions which helped them feel secure and enabled them to participate at their own pace. Opportunities for independence were promoted well, with children encouraged to make choices, serve themselves where appropriate and develop self-help skills.

While positive interactions were evident during mealtimes, the significant level of individual support required by some children occasionally affected staff capacity to engage consistently with all children. At times, children were eating without staff being positioned directly at their table to maximise opportunities for conversation, social interaction and learning. Consideration should be given to the organisation and timing of lunch sittings. On occasion, children reported feeling hungry but were required to wait some time before accessing lunch. Reviewing these arrangements would help ensure children's needs are met promptly and enhance opportunities for children to share positive social experiences with their friends and peers.

Personal planning arrangements were developing and, in most cases sampled, contained relevant information about children's health, wellbeing and support needs. Records identified key information about children's diagnoses, communication methods, sensory preferences and care requirements. There was evidence that families had contributed to planning and review processes, supporting a person-centred approach to care.

However, the quality and detail of plans were not yet consistently strong across the service. In some records, information was undated, making it difficult to determine whether it remained current and reflective of children's evolving needs. Where risks or specific support needs had been identified, the strategies staff should use were not always clearly recorded. For example, plans did not consistently provide sufficient guidance to help staff respond effectively to sensory-seeking behaviours.

In another sample, a child who had recently joined the service had only limited information recorded about their communication needs, safety awareness and support strategies, resulting in a lack of clear guidance for staff. Strengthening the consistency, detail and review of personal planning documentation would help ensure all children benefit from a shared and informed approach to meeting their individual needs.

The service recognised the importance of building strong relationships with families and had developed a variety of meaningful opportunities for family engagement. Families were encouraged to participate in nursery life through stay-and-play sessions, community outings and learning experiences. Additional support was available through initiatives such as breakfast clubs, Bookbug sessions and targeted support around areas including toilet training and speech and language development. Home learning resources and lending library materials further strengthened connections between home and nursery. These approaches helped families feel welcomed, included and supported, while promoting children's learning and development across both home and nursery environments.

Complaints

Please see Care Inspectorate website (www.careinspectorate.scot) for details of complaints about the service which have been upheld.

Detailed evaluations

Leadership	4 - Good
Leadership and management of staff and resources	4 - Good

Children play and learn	4 - Good
Playing, learning and developing	4 - Good

Children are supported to achieve	4 - Good
Nurturing care and support	4 - Good

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