Sandwick Junior High School Nursery
Day Care of Children

Sandwick Junior High School
Sandwick
Shetland
ZE2 9HH

Telephone: 01595 745 320

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
5 June 2026

Service provided by:
Shetland Islands Council

Service provider number:
SP2003002063

Service no:
CS2003016122

About the service

Sandwick Junior High Nursery School is registered with the Care Inspectorate to provide a care service to a maximum of 28 children aged from 3 years to attending primary school. The nursery may care for a maximum of 24 children aged from 3 years to not yet attending primary school and an out of school care service to a maximum of 16 children attending primary school. When the out of school care children are present a maximum of 12 children aged from 3 years to not yet attending primary school may be present. During the inspection, the out of school club was not operating.

The service operates from Sandwick Junior High School, located in the village of Sandwick which is situated on the south mainland of Shetland. The children have direct access from the playroom to an enclosed outdoor play area and are close to the leisure centre and community garden.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 3 June 2026 between 12:30 and 15:55, 4 June 2026 between 08:30 and 16:45 and 5 June 2026 between 08:30 and 09:30. 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:

- interacted with children using the service and five of their parents/carers
- received four completed questionnaires from families
- received eight completed questionnaires from staff
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice and daily experiences
- reviewed documents
- assessed core assurances, including the physical environment.

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 were cared for with nurturing and caring approaches.
- Children experienced high quality play and learning opportunities that were engaging, meaningful and responsive to their individual needs and interests.
- Children benefited from a warm and homely environment that was very well-resourced.
- Quality assurance and self-evaluation helped promote positive outcomes for children. Five areas for improvement from a previous inspection had been met.
- Management and staff were committed to the continued development of the service and should continue to build on this through the improvement plan.
- Positive relationships had been developed with families who felt welcomed into the service.

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	5 - Very 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.

Staff were guided and supported by a motivated and passionate management team who were committed to providing a high quality service for children and families. The recently recruited manager was well-organised, familiarising themselves with their responsibilities and getting to know children, families and staff. Staff told us their views and opinions were respected and the management team were visible, approachable and supportive. Good foundations and positive working relationships were being formed which would support the team to continue together on their improvement journey.

The service's vision, values and aims were reflected in practice, supporting a positive, nurturing and inclusive environment for children. Children experienced warm, caring interactions, with cuddles and smiles and had fun while engaging in active and appropriately challenging play experiences. The service advised they planned to review their vision, values and aims in consultation with children, families and staff. This would support a shared understanding and contribute to everyone feeling involved in shaping the direction of the service.

The service recognised the importance of working in partnership with children and families to support positive change. Children's views were gathered through daily conversations and through their involvement in planning processes. Families' views were collected through ongoing informal dialogue and questionnaires. These approaches had directly informed the development of the service's curriculum rationale and ongoing improvement priorities. Recent work to create the curriculum rationale involved children, families and staff. One family member commented that the process was "genuinely crystalising what the practice is." The service fed back to families in a reader friendly format about actions they had taken as a result of their comments. One parent shared: "Communication has really improved and everything is so visible now." This supported effective communication and helped families feel valued and listened to.

Management carried out monitoring and audits across a range of areas to include medication, accidents and incidents, chronologies and personal plans. This enabled the service to identify strengths and areas for improvement, supporting ongoing development and improved outcomes for children. We discussed with management regular monitoring of staff practice would further support the identification of staff skills and knowledge, helping to inform targeted training and development to improve outcomes for children.

Improvements had been made since the last inspection. An action plan outlining the key priorities identified previously was in place. Regular review and reflection supported the pace of change and helped maintain a clear focus on priorities. This enabled management to have a good overview of where further development was needed. As a result, children benefited from an ethos of continuous improvement. The service should now embed systems to measure the impact of these changes to ensure they continue to improve outcomes for children.

Quality indicator: Staff skills, knowledge 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.

Children were cared for by a committed staff team who had worked together to make improvements since the last inspection. Staff demonstrated a growing understanding of child development and how children learn, including those with additional support needs. A variety of training and professional development opportunities supported staff to develop the skills and knowledge required to meet children's needs. In addition to core training, such as first aid and child protection, staff had completed further learning in intensive interactions, observation and chronology recording. Staff also engaged with guidance documents, such as A quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors and Realising the Ambition. This supported more reflective and informed approaches to children's learning.

Positive relationships promoted consistency for children. Staff demonstrated an understanding of the importance of fostering positive relationships with families through parents' visits, meetings and daily conversations. Most parents told us they knew the staff caring for their children, felt they had a good relationship with them and believed staff cared for their children well. One parent commented: "The staff are really caring, genuine and helpful."

Staff had opportunities to share information, reflect and work collaboratively during regular team meetings. Appraisals and one-to-one 'continuous conversations' supported wellbeing and confidence. Developing leadership roles and continuing to involve staff in self-evaluation would further build confidence in leading change.

Children were supported by a staff team who mostly deployed themselves appropriately throughout the service. Staff used walkie-talkies to support communication and were flexible in responding to children's needs. Although staff required time to build confidence in being more proactive in filling gaps. For example, this included moving to particular areas of the room when needed and maintaining consistent communication during busier times of the day such as mealtimes. We agreed that the management team should continue to monitor staff deployment to ensure staff feel supported and children consistently experience positive, high quality interactions.

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

Quality indicator: Children experience high quality spaces

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 were cared for in a comfortable and welcoming environment. Staff had developed the play spaces to include carefully thought out zoned areas, where resources were easily accessed to promote play. Parents and staff spoke positively about the improvements made to the environment and how these had increased children's experiences and engagement. One parent commented: "The environment is so much better now." Another parent commented: "The nursery is now a welcoming, warm and friendly environment full of play resources." Children were supported to care for their resources and surroundings. This promoted children and staff's ownership and pride in their environment.

Developmentally appropriate spaces provided children with opportunities to be engaged and interested in their play, as well as to rest and relax. Attractive areas with sofas, rugs, soft lighting and sensory resources created quiet and comfortable places for children. Quiet and sensory spaces supported children to communicate, build relationships and regulate their emotions. These well-designed areas contributed to children's sense of wellbeing and helped them feel secure in the setting.

Displays around the environment showcased children's artwork, creations, photographs and writing. As a result, children felt valued as they were able to share their learning with family and friends. This gave a strong message that children mattered and promoted their self-esteem and confidence.

Throughout the day, children had free flow access to outdoors which supported their wellbeing. These areas offered them space to join in physical play, experiment in the mud kitchen or learn about nature. Staff were currently considering ways to further develop the outdoor spaces to improve experiences for children. This reflected a commitment to continuous improvement.

Children's safety was promoted by the secure access to the building. As part of the school, there was janitorial support to ensure the building was well-maintained. Risk assessments had been completed to identify any hazards and actions taken to reduce the risk of harm. Staff encouraged children to share their thoughts and opinions when completing risk assessments, for example through the use of a toy SIMOA (Safe, Inspect, Monitor, Observe, Act) elephant. This enabled staff to have a deeper understanding of the environment from a child's perspective and helped children to develop an understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe.

Children were supported to be healthy through effective infection prevention and control procedures. Handwashing took place by children and staff at appropriate times. This helped to minimise the risk of spread of infection.

Children's information was stored appropriately, and systems were in place to protect confidentiality. Online records were password protected and complied with data protection requirements. This gave assurance that families' rights to privacy were respected and maintained.

Children play and learn 5 - Very Good

Quality indicator: Playing, learning and developing

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 high quality play and learning opportunities that were engaging, meaningful and responsive to their individual needs and interests. They were happy and had fun as they confidently explored the well zoned play spaces. Indoors, children spent time making food in the role play area, constructing models and exploring sensory play. Outdoors, they enjoyed hunting for insects, filling and pouring water and making potions. The wide range of resources, and the freedom to move them around, supported children to extend their own learning in ways that were meaningful to them. Parents commented positively on the range of learning opportunities their children experienced. One parent commented: "Painting, dirty play, water play. The new car is a big hit for imaginative play." Another parent shared: "I see a significant

improvement on the opportunities and experiences available in nursery in the past 12 months. Each morning my child has lots of options of resources and play experiences which they enjoy."

Digital technology was used effectively to enrich children's learning. Resources such as the smartboard and light panel, as well as opportunities to explore older technologies like phones and camcorders. These resources supported engagement, exploration and skills development. Management advised this was an ongoing area of development.

Opportunities for language, literacy and numeracy development were evident in children's play experiences. Painting and drawing, indoors and outdoors, provided opportunities for mark making. Children were read stories individually and in groups, and children enjoyed looking at books with their friends. Staff counted with children during daily routines and whilst playing games. Resources such as measuring tapes and scales provided real life opportunities for children to practice numeracy skills.

Responsive and caring interactions supported the development of children's communication, language and social skills. Staff used objects of reference, talking buttons and simple language to meet individual needs. Effective questioning and commentary helped extend children's learning naturally across their experiences.

Staff demonstrated their understanding of planning approaches, using a well-balanced mix of intentional and responsive planning to meet children's individual needs. As a result, children experienced a range of high quality play and learning opportunities that reflected their interests and stages of development. Good quality observations were used to identify next steps in learning which were clearly evident in practice and supported children's progress and development. Children's learning was shared regularly with families through 'learning story' books and a closed Facebook page, supporting positive parental engagement in children's progress.

Opportunities for children to explore the school and wider environment included access to the gym hall, walks to the community garden and trips further afield to the Lerwick Up Helly Aa procession and folk festival. Parents commented positively on these experiences and how they supported their children's learning. A child commented, "I like when we go to the community garden."

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 were supported by nurturing and caring staff. Staff used warm, kind interactions to support children to feel safe and secure. For example, staff provided gentle encouragement, cuddles and used soothing voices. This resulted in confident children who were at home in the setting. One parent told us: "I feel I have always had a great relationship with the staff." Another parent commented: "[Children] are loved by staff and I feel safe and happy leaving them there."

Transitions, including settling in visits, were supportive and responded to individual needs and preferences. Children moving on to school were helped through a variety of planned activities. This contributed to children's overall wellbeing and supported them to feel prepared and confident during this significant transition.

Children's medication was well-managed. Staff were knowledgeable about children's medical needs and how to respond to these. Information to support the safe administration of medication was recorded and reviewed regularly to help ensure children's health and wellbeing.

Children's wellbeing was supported through effective personal planning which reflected their individual needs. Parents agreed that they were involved in their children's care and were asked to review information regularly. When additional help was needed, the service took a proactive, collaborative approach, engaging with families and relevant professionals to identify needs and implement effective strategies. Key information about children's preferences and care needs was available for relief staff to ensure they were knowledgeable and confident in supporting and respecting children's wellbeing and choices.

Children were supported to develop independence during mealtimes as they helped prepare fruit and vegetables for snack and self-served some of their food and drinks. Meals were appetising, and water was available throughout the day to keep children well hydrated. While staff did sit with children, this was not always consistent, and at times staff appeared task orientated, which led to some missed opportunities to support children's social experiences. We discussed staff deployment with management, who agreed to continue reviewing mealtimes to ensure children experience consistently positive and nurturing interactions.

Positive progress had been made in developing connections and communication with families. Parents were welcomed into the nursery each day and received a handover from staff about their child's day. While a few parents felt updates and communication could still improve, overall positive connections with families were established. Management advised family engagement was an ongoing area of development and was promoted through events such as Stay and Play sessions, which helped parents feel connected and valued. One parent commented: "Staff listen and are very welcoming to parents." Another parent shared: "I am happy with the improvements made and look forward to seeing continued improvement."

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

The provider should develop the skills and knowledge of the staff team in relation to recording significant events and incidents in children's lives.

Chronologies should be used to keep records and document how children are supported through significant events and life changes and identify where additional supports may be needed from other agencies.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standard (HSCS) which state that: "My care and support meet my needs and is right for me" (HSCS 1.19).

This area for improvement was made on 3 November 2025.

Action taken since then

Chronologies were routinely used to record significant events in children's lives, including any follow up actions needed to support children and families. Staff had attended training to develop their skills and knowledge in recording and using chronologies effectively. As a result, systems were in place to ensure children were supported through significant events and that additional help could be identified when needed.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

To support children's learning and development, the provider should ensure children experience high quality play and learning relevant to their age and stage of development. This should include but is not limited to:

a) planning processes are effective to promote children's learning

b) staff demonstrate an understanding of child development and how to use spontaneous play to support children's learning

c) observation and assessment of children's learning identify and promotes their progress.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: "As a child, I have fun as I develop my skills in understanding, thinking and investigation, and problem solving, including through imaginative play and storytelling" (HSCS 1.30).

This area for improvement was made on 3 November 2025.

Action taken since then

Staff had developed the play spaces to include carefully planned zoned areas where resources were easy for children to access, promoting high quality play and learning. Staff demonstrated an understanding of planning approaches, using a mix of intentional and responsive planning to meet children's individual needs. As a result, children experienced a range of meaningful play and learning opportunities that reflected their interests and stages of development.

Observations were used to identify next steps in learning, and these were evident in practice, supporting children's progress. The staff team used a range of national guidance to develop their practice and regular staff meetings provided opportunities to discuss observations of learning and appropriate next steps. Staff showed a growing understanding of child development and how to use spontaneous play to extend learning. A variety of training and professional development opportunities, including learning in intensive interaction and observation, helped staff develop the skills and knowledge required to meet children's needs effectively.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 3

In order to ensure a safe environment for children, the provider, manager and staff should further develop systems for identifying potential hazards and take prompt action to address these.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: "My environment is secure and safe" (HSCS 5.19).

This area for improvement was made on 3 November 2025.

Action taken since then

Playroom spaces were clean, well-furnished and supported children's independence. Staff were aware of factors that could increase the risk of children leaving the environment, and the Care Inspectorate SIMOA (Safe, Inspect, Monitor, Observe, Act) campaign was used to support safe practice. Children took part in discussions to assess whether the outdoor space was safe before use, helping them develop awareness of risk. As part of the school, janitorial support ensured the building was well-maintained. Risk assessments had been completed to identify potential hazards, with clear actions taken to reduce the risk of harm.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 4

To ensure that outcomes for children and families continuously improve, the provider and manager should develop robust and effective quality assurance processes. This should include but is not limited to, self-evaluation and planning for improvement, carrying out audits of children's information and personal plans, medication and children's chronologies and monitoring staff practice.

This is to ensure that children's 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 3 November 2025.

Action taken since then

The service had developed quality assurance processes which included an action plan outlining key priorities identified at the previous inspection and a quality assurance calendar to support ongoing monitoring. Management and staff carried out regular audits across a range of areas, including medication, accidents and incidents, chronologies and personal plans. These processes led to improvements in the environment, personal plans, chronologies, planning and observations. The strengthened approach supported the service to identify strengths and areas for development, contributing to continuous improvement and positive outcomes for children.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 5

To meet the care and learning needs of all children, the provider should ensure effective supervision and quality engagement for all children across the day.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: "People have time to support and care for me and to speak with me" (HSCS 3.16).

This area for improvement was made on 3 November 2025.

Action taken since then

Staff deployment had improved across the day, and there were enough staff available to meet children's needs. Regular staff meetings and the use of walkie-talkies strengthened communication and supported children's safety as they moved between indoor and outdoor areas. Consistent supply staff were used when required, helping maintain continuity for children. Staff were increasingly confident in deploying themselves appropriately throughout the environment and were developing greater awareness of when to move to particular areas of the playroom and how to maintain effective communication during busier times of the day. Management agreed to continue to monitor staff deployment to ensure staff felt supported and children consistently experienced positive, high quality interactions.

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.com

Detailed evaluations

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

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

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

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

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.