Brae High School Nursery
Day Care of Children

Brae High School
Brae
Shetland
ZE2 9QJ

Telephone: 01595 745 600

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
3 June 2026

Service provided by:
Shetland Islands Council

Service provider number:
SP2003002063

Service no:
CS2003016128

About the service

Brae High School Nursery is a day care of children service registered to provide care to a maximum of 55 children up to those attending primary school at any one-time. Of those 55 during term time:

- no more than 5 are aged 2 to under 3 years;
- no more than 38 aged 3 years to those not yet attending primary school;
- no more than 12 are attending primary school.

During school holidays.

- of those 55 no more than 5 are aged 2 to under 3 years;
- no more than 18 aged 3 years to those not yet attending primary school;
- no more than 32 are attending primary school.

Children due to start Primary 1 may attend for the Summer Holiday period prior to starting school on August of that year.

The service is delivered from a designated area within the primary section of Brae High School. Children are cared for in a large open play area with access to smaller rooms for quieter activities. They can access outdoor areas direct from the playroom. School aged children can access an area of the nursery room, as well as a separate cloakroom, toilet and activity room.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 1 and 2 June 2026 between the times of 14:00 - 16:50 and 08:25 - 14:10. This inspection was carried out by two inspectors 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 children using the service and spoke to three of their parents/carers
- received four completed questionnaires from parents/carers
- spoke with staff and the management team
- assessed core assurances, including the physical environment
- observed practice and children's experiences
- 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

- Children benefitted from attending a service with an ethos of continuous improvement. This was well supported by the acting head teacher.
- Children were happy, confident and well engaged in their play and learning.
- Children's health and wellbeing were promoted through nurturing and warm interactions with staff.
- There was a strong, skilled staff team who worked well together to promote positive experiences for children.

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	5 - Very 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.

A whole-school vision, values and aims (VVA), had been developed, which were displayed within the nursery. These had recently been reviewed by the previous headteacher, with involvement from parents. The service was beginning to embed these values in practice with children, for example, using characters such as 'Creativity Cat' to support understanding of concepts including creativity, aspiration, relationships and equality. Plans were in place to develop a child-friendly version to further support engagement.

The ethos of the VVA was evident in practice. Staff demonstrated strong, nurturing relationships with children, which supported a positive and inclusive environment. Further promotion of the VVA would help families better understand what to expect from the service and support them to share their views and contribute to ongoing improvement.

A range of approaches was in place to gather feedback from families, including surveys, meetings and informal communication. While survey responses suggested that some families did not feel fully involved, we observed that there were systems in place. Strengthening communication and feedback processes would enhance participation and ensure families feel listened to.

Staff and leaders demonstrated a strong commitment to developing children's participation. Children's views were captured through floorbooks and scribed comments, and there were well-considered plans to extend this into observations of engagement and interests. This will further strengthen how children influence practice and planning.

Quality assurance processes were established and beginning to positively impact outcomes for children. Audits had identified areas for development and led to meaningful improvements, such as targeted support for individual children and enhancements to the learning environment. The service had a good understanding of areas requiring further development, including consistency in observations. Appropriate plans were in place to address this through professional learning and reflective practice. There was a strong foundation for ongoing development of quality assurance processes. The service was well placed to continue embedding these and as the staff team stabilises, there will be opportunities to build shared responsibility and sustain improvements over time.

There was a clear commitment to continuous improvement. The improvement plan demonstrated a manageable pace of change, supported by regular review. Responsiveness could be further enhanced by progressing smaller, practical improvements more quickly.

Recruitment processes, led by the local authority with leadership input, considered how candidates' skills and values complemented the team. This supported a cohesive workforce. There was potential to further involve children and families in recruitment, building on existing practice such as pupil council involvement.

A structured induction process supported staff confidence and understanding of their roles. This included planned tasks, tracked completion and follow-up discussions with the manager. National guidance could be

used further to strengthen reflective practice.

Staff consistently reported feeling well supported by leadership and colleagues. They spoke positively about access to training and opportunities for professional development, demonstrating a culture of continuous learning within the team.

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 were happy, well settled and actively engaged in their play. They experienced a range of meaningful opportunities which supported sustained involvement and progression in learning. Staff demonstrated a secure understanding of how children learn, which was reflected in high quality interactions and well-considered provision supporting curiosity, creativity and development.

Children accessed a wide range of resources independently and made choices about their play, including outdoors. The variety of outdoor spaces enhanced opportunities for exploration and contributed to rich, motivating experiences. A balance of responsive and intentional learning was evident. Effective use of the local community, including visits to shops, care settings and outdoor environments, provided real-life contexts which deepened learning. Small group experiences, such as early sewing, supported skill development and meaningful discussion. As a result, children were highly engaged and developing a broad range of skills.

Digital technology was used effectively to enhance learning. Children confidently used tools such as the smart board to explore number concepts and interactive games, demonstrating enjoyment and growing understanding of technology. Real-life resources further supported imaginative play, with staff skilfully modelling their use while maintaining children's ownership of play. This contributed to authentic and purposeful learning experiences.

Staff interactions consistently extended children's thinking. Practitioners used open-ended questioning, modelling and mathematical language effectively, promoting curiosity and problem-solving. Children were well supported to develop literacy, language and numeracy skills through embedded opportunities for mark making, early writing and everyday use of number. Regular Bookbug sessions enriched literacy experiences, with children showing enthusiasm in storytelling and confidently retelling and re-enacting stories. Staff used expressive techniques to engage children and support participation.

Positive peer interactions were encouraged, with children supported to share, take turns and express their feelings. This contributed to the development of social and emotional skills.
Children were consistently at the centre of planning. Learning stories and floorbooks effectively captured children's experiences and progress, informing next steps and promoting continuity in learning. These approaches were increasingly consistent and well embedded, demonstrating clear links between observation, planning and progression. Tracking systems were used effectively to monitor development and identify gaps, enabling timely and targeted support.

Strong relationships with families supported the sharing of information about children's learning through daily interactions and learning stories. Some parents told us that communication could be improved. The

service recognised the potential to further strengthen this by developing more accessible and regular ways of sharing learning, which would enhance parental engagement and support continuity between home and the setting.

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.

Interactions between staff and children were consistently warm, nurturing and responsive. Staff demonstrated a very good understanding of the importance of secure relationships, which underpinned practice and was appropriately recognised as a strength. Children were given time and space to express their needs and feelings, with staff responding sensitively to both verbal and non-verbal cues. Comfort and reassurance were provided in ways that supported children to feel safe, valued and emotionally secure.

Staff communicated effectively with children throughout the day. For example, when they needed to leave a child to carry out a task, they provided clear explanations and reassurance, supporting continuity of care. Daily transitions were well managed, with children given timely prompts to prepare for changes such as mealtimes. Consistent daily routines helped children feel secure and confident. These were clearly communicated and understood by children. Staff offered a warm welcome at the start of the day, supporting positive attachments and enabling children and families to separate with confidence. There were opportunities for parents to share information with staff, although practice varied slightly and could be strengthened to ensure consistency for all families.

Transitions into primary school were very well supported. Children benefitted from planned visits and familiarisation with new environments. Where children required additional support, this was tailored to individual needs, including additional visits. Parents were also reassured and supported through this process, contributing to positive outcomes.

Strong and consistent relationships were evident. Staff knew children well, including their personalities, interests and support strategies. Children confidently approached staff and involved them in their play, reflecting a strong sense of trust and belonging. Consistent relief staff were used when required, helping to maintain continuity of care and supporting effective response to children's needs. This consistency supported effective responses to children's needs.

Care practices respected children's dignity and promoted independence. Personal care routines were carried out discreetly, protecting privacy. Children were supported to make choices and were given clear explanations, for example, during personal care or when applying sun cream. Medication was administered safely and sensitively, with staff remaining calm and encouraging children's participation.

Mealtimes were relaxed, sociable experiences where children engaged positively with peers and staff. Staff consistently sat with children, supporting both safety and meaningful interaction. Children were encouraged to develop independence through helping to prepare snack, self-serving and clearing away. Fresh drinking water was readily available, supporting health and wellbeing.

Personal plans were in place for all children and reflected individual needs, including what was important to them and strategies to support wellbeing. Information from home was used to support consistent care

approaches. There was scope to further strengthen some personal plans by providing more detailed guidance and ensuring information fully reflected staff knowledge of children. Where relevant, significant life events and involvement of other agencies were recorded, supporting a holistic understanding of each child. Staff were observed using agreed strategies consistently in practice.

Staff knowledge of children and in many cases, their families, supported responsive care. Families spoke positively about relationships with staff and felt comfortable within the setting. The service had taken steps to support family engagement, including offering stay-and-play sessions and inviting parents to participate in Bookbug. While uptake had been limited, the service demonstrated awareness of the need to further develop inclusive approaches to overcome barriers to engagement.

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

Attention must be given to the children's care plans. These must be reviewed every six months or sooner should the child's needs change.

Reference: National Care Standards early education and childcare up to the age of 16.
Standard 3: health and wellbeing; standard 6: support and development.

This area for improvement was made on 19 February 2018.

Action taken since then
Personal plans were in place for all children and were reviewed regularly, at least every six months, with parents/carers.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

Attention must be given to the outside door into the play area. This must be made safe in order to ensure the safety of the young children who use the service.

Reference: National Care Standards early education and childcare up to the age of 16.
Standard 2: a safe environment; standard 3: health and wellbeing.

This area for improvement was made on 19 February 2018.

Action taken since then
Work had been undertaken to make identified hazards safe.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 3

Staff should review how they store spare clothing. This should not be in an open container in the toilet.

Reference: National Care Standards, early education and childcare up to the age of 16.
Standard 2: a safe environment; standard 3: health and wellbeing.

This area for improvement was made on 19 February 2018.

Action taken since then

Spare clothing was now stored in a covered container with in the nappy changing room. This adhered to infection prevention and control guidance.

This are for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 4

The service should look at their quality assurance regime and make sure that nursery parents and carers are given formal opportunities to evaluate and comment on the nursery. They should also make sure results are shared with parents and carers and how they plan to action any suggestions and comments they received.

Reference: National Care Standards, early education and childcare up to the age of 16.
Standard 13: Improving the service

This recommendation was made on 27 January 2015.

Action taken on previous recommendation

This was ongoing - the service were keen to encourage parents to be involved with their child's early learning and childcare whilst at Brae.

This area for improvement was made on 27 January 2015.

Action taken since then

Processes were in place to encourage parental feedback on their children's experiences. Further work is planned to continue to encourage participation.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 5

Staff need to review the management of the children's personal plans ensuring plans are stored individually and reviewed at least every six months.

Reference: National Care Standards, early education and childcare up to the age of 16.
Standard 6: support and development.

This recommendation was made on 27 January 2015

Action taken on previous recommendation

We saw the children's care plans were safely stored within the setting. However, there was some work needed on the care plans - see body of the report.

This area for improvement was made on 27 January 2015.

Action taken since then

Personal plans were now stored within separate files and reviewed at least every six months.

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

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

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

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