St. Leonards Nursery School
Day Care of Children

6 West Adam Street
Edinburgh
EH8 9SY

Telephone: 01316 674 674

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
8 September 2026

Service provided by:
City of Edinburgh Council

Service provider number:
SP2003002576

Service no:
CS2003017056

About the service

St. Leonards Nursery School is a registered daycare of children service. The service is delivered from a standalone building, which sits within the Pleasance area of Edinburgh. Children have access to two open plan playrooms, snack and dining spaces, toilets, and an enclosed garden.

The service is registered to provide a day care of children service to a maximum of 64 children at any one time aged between 3 years and primary school entry.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Monday 7 and Tuesday 8 September 2026, between 8:30 and 15:45. One inspector carried out the inspection 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:

- spoke with children;
- reviewed survey responses from 13 parents and 13 staff;
- spoke face to face with two parents;
- spoke with management and staff;
- observed practice and children's experiences; and
- 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 experienced warm, nurturing care from staff who knew them well and responded sensitively to their needs.
• Children were highly engaged in their play and learning through meaningful experiences that reflected their interests, choices and stages of development.
• Leaders fostered a positive culture where children, families and staff were valued and involved in the ongoing development of the service.
• Well-established self-evaluation and quality assurance processes supported continuous improvement and enhanced outcomes for children.
• Leaders fostered strong partnership working between nursery and school staff, supporting the sharing of effective practice and consistent approaches. This enhanced continuity for children and contributed to positive experiences and outcomes.
• Children benefited from an inclusive, rights-based environment where their identities, languages, cultures and family backgrounds were recognised, respected and celebrated, promoting a strong sense of belonging.

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	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 5 - Very Good

Quality Indicator: Leadership and management of staff and resources

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.

Leaders had developed a clear vision, values and aims that were well embedded across the service and consistently informed practice. These had been reviewed in consultation with children, families and staff, demonstrating a commitment to ensuring they remained relevant and reflective of the service community.

Staff spoke confidently about the nursery's vision of providing children with "the best start in life" through a safe, happy and stimulating environment. The values of respect, equality and nurture were evident in interactions, discussions and the documentation reviewed. Staff demonstrated a strong commitment to placing children at the centre of their practice. One staff member told us, "whatever we do, it's always about the children", while another described the nursery as "a hidden gem in the city". Staff also recognised the importance of positive relationships with families, sharing that "parents feel this friendly, open and honest atmosphere when they come in here".

Feedback from families reflected the caring and supportive ethos of the service. One parent shared, "We are very happy to have found this nursery. Our child always feels understood, cared for and supported, and it's lovely to see how much they have developed since joining." Another told us, "We are very grateful to all the staff for the care, kindness and support they give X." The strong relationships between staff, children and families contributed to a welcoming and inclusive culture where people felt respected, valued and supported. As a result, children experienced a strong sense of belonging, developed trusting relationships and were supported to make progress in their learning, wellbeing and development.

Leaders demonstrated a strong commitment to self-evaluation and continuous improvement. A reflective approach was embedded across the service, with staff confidently identifying strengths and areas for development. Improvement priorities were informed by feedback from children, families and staff, alongside ongoing evaluation of practice and outcomes.

Staff demonstrated a willingness to critically reflect on and adapt practice to improve outcomes for children. For example, the move from digital to hard-copy floor books enhanced children's participation and enabled their views, interests and experiences to be captured more meaningfully. Staff were also committed to ongoing professional learning and used training, professional qualifications, guidance and collaborative reflection to strengthen practice. Training in areas such as co-regulation and proactive de-escalation strategies increased staff confidence in supporting children's emotional wellbeing and helped promote a consistent approach across the team.

The service improvement plan was well structured and focused on clear priorities, including strengthening children's participation, embedding nurturing and trauma-informed approaches, developing literacy and numeracy, enhancing emotional wellbeing and improving engagement with families. Planned improvements were clearly linked to improving experiences and outcomes for children.

Self-evaluation was purposeful, embedded and focused on impact. Leaders and staff demonstrated a clear understanding of how improvement activity had influenced practice and outcomes. As a result, children benefited from a responsive and inclusive service that continually adapted to meet their needs, supported positive transitions and enhanced their wellbeing, learning and development.

Feedback from families demonstrated that leaders had established effective communication and engagement approaches. As a result, families felt listened to, valued and involved in service development, contributing to positive partnerships that enhanced outcomes for children.

Children play and learn 5 - Very Good

Quality Indicator: Play 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.

The service demonstrated a strong commitment to providing engaging, meaningful and developmentally appropriate learning experiences. Children were consistently busy, motivated and highly engaged in their play and learning. Staff had created welcoming, well-resourced environments that promoted curiosity, independence and exploration across both indoor and outdoor spaces. As a result, children confidently made choices, followed their interests and took increasing ownership of their learning.

Staff used skilled interactions to extend children's thinking and deepen learning. During a story session, children enthusiastically shared ideas, predicted outcomes and discussed characters and events. Practitioners encouraged children to think creatively, solve problems and express their views, which resulted in high levels of participation and enjoyment. Therefore, children were developing strong communication skills, confidence in expressing their ideas and the ability to think critically.

The outdoor environment further enriched children's experiences by providing opportunities to explore natural materials, develop physical skills and engage in open-ended play. Families spoke positively about the range and quality of experiences available. One parent commented that, "children have a variety of themed experiences each week giving them an opportunity to do art, role-play, imagination, reading etc". Another shared, "My child participates in new activities frequently, whilst also demonstrating a familiarity with the more frequent offerings. The learning is relevant to the time of year, and what can be seen in the outdoor space is brilliantly designed." As a result, children benefited from a rich learning environment that supported creativity, curiosity, physical development and enjoyment of learning.

Quality interactions were a significant strength of the service. Staff consistently demonstrated warm, nurturing and respectful relationships with children and families, helping children to feel safe, secure and valued. Interactions were consistently warm and supportive. Staff used praise, encouragement and reassurance effectively to promote children's wellbeing and confidence. As a result, children demonstrated a strong sense of belonging, formed positive relationships and approached play and learning with confidence and resilience.

Staff demonstrated a strong understanding of children's individual stages of development and skilfully adapted experiences to provide appropriate support and challenge. For example, practitioners extended numeracy activities by introducing additional number challenges for children who were ready to progress their learning. This ensured children experienced success while continuing to build on existing skills, knowledge and understanding.

The service had established planning and assessment approaches that placed children at the centre of their learning journeys. Planning was informed by observations, learning journals, floor books, developmental trackers, progression pathways and discussions with families. Staff used both intentional and responsive approaches to ensure experiences reflected children's interests, strengths and developmental needs. As a result, children experienced personalised learning that supported their ongoing progress and achievement.

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.

The service demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting children's health, wellbeing and individual needs. Staff knew children well and confidently described the strategies and supports in place to promote their wellbeing, including for those with medical needs, allergies and additional support requirements. As a result, children experienced responsive, individualised care which helped them feel secure, included and able to participate fully in nursery life.

Mealtimes were calm, inclusive and nurturing experiences. Staff used these opportunities skilfully to promote conversation, extend children's vocabulary and encourage positive social interactions. Children appeared relaxed and engaged confidently with both peers and adults while developing increasing independence during daily routines. As a result, children were supported to develop their communication skills, social confidence and sense of belonging.

The service placed a strong emphasis on supporting positive transitions. Staff worked collaboratively with families, partner schools and other professionals to ensure children were well prepared for changes in their care and learning. Effective information sharing and partnership working promoted continuity in children's experiences and supported consistent approaches to meeting their individual needs. Leaders recognised the value of these relationships and had plans in place to further strengthen partnership working.

Feedback from families reflected the positive relationships established across the service, with parents describing staff as "very attentive, caring and professional" and "warm, calm and extremely professional". As a result, children benefited from nurturing, well-coordinated support which promoted their wellbeing, confidence and inclusion.

The service had established robust and effective personal planning arrangements which supported a holistic understanding of each child and ensured their needs were identified, monitored and reviewed. Staff demonstrated a strong awareness of children's strengths, interests, wellbeing needs and family circumstances and could clearly explain how this informed their day-to-day practice.

Leaders took a collaborative approach to personal planning, with key workers and staff regularly reviewing children's progress, achievements and support needs. Personal plans were reviewed at least every six months, with more frequent reviews taking place where additional support was required. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) were integrated into planning and review processes, ensuring targeted supports were monitored and evaluated effectively. As a result, children's changing needs were identified promptly and appropriate support was provided at the right time.

Strong partnerships with families further enhanced the effectiveness of personal planning. Regular communication ensured that parents' views and knowledge of their child informed decision-making and contributed to a shared understanding of children's strengths, needs and progress. For children requiring additional support, staff worked closely with external agencies and professionals to coordinate interventions and review outcomes. This helped children benefit from consistent, joined-up support which promoted their wellbeing, participation and development.

Staff effectively supported children with an additional language through visual supports, signing, translated information and strong partnership working with families. This promoted children's inclusion, participation and sense of belonging. As a result, children experienced an inclusive environment where they felt respected, valued and supported to be themselves.

The service demonstrated a strong commitment to inclusion, equality and children's rights. Children's identities, languages, cultures and family backgrounds were recognised and valued throughout the setting. Displays celebrated the diversity of the nursery community, while leaders supported staff understanding through effective information sharing and guidance.

Families told us they felt welcomed, listened to and involved in their child's nursery experience. This helped foster strong relationships between home and nursery, contributing to positive outcomes for children through consistent, coordinated approaches to their care and wellbeing.

Complaints

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

Detailed evaluations

Leadership	5 - Very Good
Leadership and management of staff and resources	5 - Very 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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Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

enquiries@careinspectorate.gov.scot

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