Avoch Primary Early Learning and Child Care Day Care of Children

Avoch Primary School
Station Road
AVOCH
IV9 8PS

Telephone: 01381 620 369

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

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10 June 2026

Service provided by:
Highland Council

Service provider number:
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Service no:
CS2003017171

About the service

Avoch Early Learning and Child Care is a day care of children service situated in Avoch Primary School in the village of Avoch.

The service is registered to provide a care service for a maximum of 78 children aged three years to those attending primary school.

The service is situated in a residential area close to the village centre near shops, a beach, a park with tennis courts and other amenities. The children are cared for in a purpose built ELC setting and have access to two playrooms and two enclosed outdoor spaces. Children can also access parts of the school building such as the hall.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Tuesday 9 June and Wednesday 10 June 2026. 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:

- spoke/spent time with children using the service and two of their friends and family
- received 16 completed questionnaires which included six received from families/carers of children, and ten received from staff.
- spoke with staff and the management team
- 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

- Children's experiences and outcomes were beginning to improve as a result of service improvement activity, particularly in relation to the environment.
- There was increased involvement of children and parents, with their views beginning to influence service developments to improve the learning environment and overall experiences.
- Children experienced a calm, organised transition from play to eating lunch which minimised disruption to play.
- Staff worked well together, demonstrating caring values and a commitment to improvement.
- Children experienced variable quality in staff interactions, resulting in inconsistent support to deepen thinking, sustain engagement and extend learning.
- Support and supervision, and professional learning had not yet led to consistently high-quality interactions or practice across the team.
- Children benefited from a warm, homely and well-organised environment that supported them to feel secure, settled and engaged in play.
- Children's learning and development were increasingly being tracked through developmental overviews, beginning to help staff build a clearer picture of individual progress and achievements.

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	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Children thrive and develop in quality spaces	4 - Good
Children play and learn	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Children are supported to achieve	4 - Good

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

Leadership 3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

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 vision, values and aims of the service were beginning to inform day-to-day practice. The shared vision for change was beginning to support key stakeholders to be involved in improvement processes. Children's and parental voice were beginning to be captured. This enabled their involvement in some changes which positively impacted children's experiences and outcomes, such as improvements made to the environment. Embedding this type of values based approach to improvement processes could support the service to promote a cycle of continuous improvement.

Overall, engagement with key stakeholders, including parents and children, in service developments was positive. Parents reported having opportunities to share their views and contribute to improvement. Almost all parents who responded to our survey felt that their feedback was valued and considered. A parent told us, "Feedback is always welcomed along with new ideas."

Staff told us they felt supported by the leadership team and demonstrated a clear commitment to improving their practice. There was a positive ethos across the service, with staff showing a willingness to reflect, share ideas, and identify areas for development. Leadership groups had begun to support improvements and some early changes such as, enhancements to the learning environment were evident.

Where monitoring and quality assurance processes have been applied consistently, they are beginning to have positive impacts, particularly in improving the learning environment. There is now scope to extend these further with a focus on individual staff practice, specifically to strengthen the quality and consistency of interactions.

(See area for improvement 1).

We suggested that establishing regular, focused observations and discussions to support staff reflection and understanding would promote greater consistency.

Since the last inspection, the service had made progress in improving outcomes for children. Improvement activity was supported by a clear action plan, which had helped drive a number of positive changes across the service. For example, improvements to staff deployment had strengthened support for children and contributed to more effective day-to-day practice.
The service demonstrated a commitment to continuous improvement and had taken positive steps in some key areas. While progress had been more gradual in some aspects of practice, developments were beginning to have a positive impact on children's experiences. Staff were increasingly focused on meeting children's individual needs, and auditing processes had identified areas where further strengthening would support greater consistency. To reflect progress to meet a requirement we made at the last inspection.

(See section, What the service has done to meet any requirements made at or since the last inspection)

We have made a new area for improvement.

(See area for improvement 1).

This will support focus to remain on effective monitoring of staff practice to enable consistent skills and knowledge to be developed and embedded.

Some auditing and monitoring had taken place but had not yet led to continuous improvement. For example, approaches to meeting children's individual needs remained inconsistent. This meant not all children were fully supported in their care and learning. We suggested to the leadership team that they may want to consider introducing case tracking alongside existing auditing arrangements. This could provide additional oversight and build on existing strengths, to help ensure children receive consistently high quality play, care and learning.

Self-evaluation processes were developing but were not yet systematic or clearly linked to measurable improvements in outcomes for children. Developing meaningful ways to record and evidence outcomes would support staff to evaluate the effectiveness of changes and identify areas for further improvement. Strengthening these processes will help ensure a more consistent approach and improved outcomes for all children.

Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

We evaluated this quality indicator as satisfactory/adequate where strengths just outweighed the weaknesses.

Overall, staff demonstrated caring, respectful and nurturing interactions, building positive relationships that supported children to feel safe and valued. Staff demonstrated shared values in articulating their vision for positive outcomes for children.

Staff worked well as a team, communicating clearly and supporting each other. They made very effective use of walkie talkies which helped ensure routines and transitions were generally smooth and well managed. The addition of ear-pieces kept the potential noise of walkie talkie communication to a minimum. They also promoted discreet communication, supporting individual children and respecting dignity and privacy.

Children experienced variable quality of interactions with staff not always using effective strategies to support and extend children's play and learning. As a result, children experienced differences in the quality of support they received, which impacted their experiences.

The service was at an early stage of identifying and using the strengths within the staff team to support each other's development and learning. Processes for support and supervision were not yet having a sufficient impact on improving practice. Some gaps remained in how staff learning needs were identified and addressed. Opportunities for reflective discussion could be further developed to strengthen individual and team knowledge. We acknowledged that focused staff practice observations were due to take place at the time of inspection. This meant, arrangements for providing individual feedback and supporting professional development, fostering consistent skills, knowledge and understanding across the team, were not fully established.

Some professional learning undertaken had a positive impact on children's experiences. For example, where best practice guidance had been used to inform improvement processes, this had also strengthened staff

awareness of aligning their practice. Overall professional learning was not yet sufficiently targeted to ensure it consistently improved practice and outcomes for children.

The manager told us about recent recruitment challenges for vacant posts. Staff meeting minutes showed that planned absences, such as vacancies, were taken into account, with cover organised accordingly wherever possible. We advised the service to check that school staff used for cover had the necessary registration in place to work in a childcare setting.

Areas for improvement

1.

To support children to have high quality experiences and interactions, which impact on care, play, learning and development outcomes, the provider must ensure that robust quality assurance processes and systems are in place to monitor the work of each member of staff and the service as a whole.

This is in order to ensure care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards, which state that:

"I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes." (HSCS 4.19)

Children thrive and develop in quality spaces — 4 - Good

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 experience high quality spaces
Children's experiences and outcomes were beginning to positively benefit from improvements to their physical environment. The indoor environment had a warm, homely feel, which helped children feel comfortable, secure and settled. A thoughtful approach had been taken in creating environments, indoors and outdoors, that support children's play, learning and overall experience. There were spaces to encourage group play as well as quieter, individual, activities.

One of the outdoor spaces had been developed to promote the use of loose parts. This encouraged creativity and imaginative play. Children were observed to be more engaged and involved in this space than previous inspections. The service recognised that a second outdoor space was not yet providing a similar experience for children. This provided a clear next step for further development.

Children' play, learning and development were beginning to benefit from a wider range of experiences. There was scope to continue to develop this further, particularly through the continuous provision of experiences across areas such as literacy and numeracy outdoors.

Children were increasingly involved in making decisions about their environment. For example, being able to select and use resources in a way that promoted choice and ownership of play, such as moving items

between spaces. There were some gaps in resources, for example, the provision of mark-making and measuring tools such as tapes, which would further enhance children's learning and development.

Children's health and wellbeing benefitted from measures which supported the reduction of infection through prevention and control systems. For example, supervision of handwashing was well considered. Children were supported well to wash their hands effectively at key times of the day. The environment was generally clean and well organised.

Children's information was stored and managed in accordance with data protection legislation. As a result, a previous area for improvement had been met

(See section, What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection).

Children play and learn 3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

We evaluated this quality indicator as satisfactory/adequate where strengths just outweighed the weaknesses.

Playing, learning and developing
Children were generally having fun and engaged in play. For most children we noted increased levels of sustained engagement since our previous inspection. A few children moved frequently between activities. Inconsistent practice meant some opportunities for meaningful interactions to extend play, learning and development were sometimes missed.

Some children's learning and development benefitted from some staff playing alongside children who used open-ended questions to sustain play and enhance learning. Overall, interactions tended to be brief and lacked a consistent approach. Sometimes staff missed cues to provide carefully considered, high quality support to enable some children to consistently maintain focus, explore ideas in depth or extend their learning. The service had identified quality interactions to deepen play and extend learning as an improvement priority.

Children's interests and curiosity was captured in some interesting invitations to play. Some activities reflected children's recent interests in tadpoles and insects. For example, fine motor skills could be developed by threading pasta onto "ladybird legs." The provision of loose parts and access to water provided opportunities for children to follow their curiosity.

There were some opportunities for children to develop literacy and numeracy knowledge, understanding and skills. This core learning was incorporated across some play areas across the setting with scope to develop this further

(See also section, What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection, Area for improvement 2).

Reading stories on demand to children was helping to foster emotional security as well as promoting enjoyment of stories and reading together.

Approaches to planning and recording children's progress were continuing to be developed. Children's learning and development were being considered through the use of developmental overviews. The leadership team had begun to analyse information to influence intentional planning. Using this data to consistently inform planning and identify relevant next steps for individual children was at an early stage of development. This was beginning to enable staff to build a clearer picture of individual progress and achievements. The service recognised that the use of assessment information to inform children's next steps and planning required further development.

Children are supported to achieve 4 - Good

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.

Nurturing care and support
Children were cared for in a welcoming environment. Overall children experienced warm, nurturing interactions with staff. Staff were more often at children's level during interactions than at previous inspections. This created a supportive and caring environment for children. Comfort and reassurance were given when needed or requested by children, helping them feel secure and settled. Children attending breakfast club experienced a calm, quiet start to their day. Consideration could be given to providing more physical activity for children who would benefit from this before attending classes. Overall, staff demonstrated genuine warmth in their relationships with children although were some missed cues to provide support for some children.

Families were welcomed into the setting, supporting positive relationships and regular communication. This created opportunities for informal information sharing, and a parent told us, "I can come into the nursery and pick up my child... (their) key worker keeps me updated on my child's progress and can arrange a meeting anytime if needed."

Snack experiences were calm and sociable, providing opportunities for positive interaction and communication. Staff supported routines and encouraged conversation, promoting social skills and language development. The use of real crockery and the presentation of flowers on tables contributed to a welcoming and homely environment, enhancing children's overall experience. There were some missed opportunities to more fully involve children attending out of school care in snack preparation.

Transitions from play to lunch times had been carefully planned to minimise disruption to children's play. The service had successfully implemented a rolling lunch since our last inspection. Good communication between staff meant that children were able to continue playing until they wanted to transition to one of the spaces at the lunch table. This supported children's engagement in play allowing them to continue to explore and follow their curiosity. We suggested that staff may need to consider how to support transitions like these for future cohorts, making adjustments to support individual needs.

Most personal plans contained sufficient information to support children's basic needs. These had been reviewed and updated with parents within timescales. Some strategies that had been identified to support children's needs were clearly detailed. Some personal plans were not sufficiently detailed to effectively meet individual needs. For example, the impact of strategies was not always clear to enable staff to provide effective support consistently. This could compromise children's continuity of care.

(See section, What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection).

Overall children's health, wellbeing and safety benefitted from the management of medication systems in place. We found some recorded information which would benefit from adding further details in relation to triggers and symptoms. This would provide clear information for staff supporting the child.

What the service has done to meet any requirements we made at or since the last inspection

Requirements

Requirement 1

By 12 January 2026, the provider must ensure that there are robust quality assurance processes and systems in place to monitor progress in making improvements, and ensuring that these are sustained.

To do this the provider must at a minimum ensure:

a) Clear and effective plans are in place for maintaining and improving the service.
b) The leadership team effectively monitors the work of each member of staff and the service as a whole.

This is in order to comply with Regulation 3 and Regulation 4(1)(a) of The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/210).

This is in order to ensure care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards, 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 requirement was made on 12 September 2025.

Action taken on previous requirement

The service had made some progress in improving outcomes for children. Improvement activity was supported by a clear action plan, which had helped drive a number of positive changes across the service. Some improvement work was just beginning at the time of inspection. Further time was needed to strengthen quality assurance processes to monitor ongoing progress with these improvements. We recognised the need for sufficient time to enable ongoing work to be fully developed and for impact on children's outcomes to be evaluated.

For example, monitoring staff practice was in early stages of implementation. Initial monitoring had

included providing feedback about improvements to children's lunch time experience and the environment. Planned observations were impacted by the timing of our inspection. However, a clear, general focus had been previously shared with staff. Having a focused area to feedback to staff will be key to moving skills forward and accelerating the pace of change. To support focus on effective monitoring of staff practice, a new area for improvement has been made under the section, Leadership.

Met - within timescales

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

To support children to have their individual needs met effectively, the service should further develop their approach to identifying and sharing strategies with all staff. This should include but is not limited to:

a) ensuring personal plans clearly set out children's current needs for individual care and support.

b) ensuring strategies of support for individual children are developed and implemented by all staff

c) ensuring all staff are knowledgeable and understand the information within the personal plans and use this to consistently meet each child's needs.

This is to ensure care and support is consistent with the Care Inspectorate document 'Guide for providers on personal planning'.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'My personal plan (sometimes referred to as a care plan) is right for me because it sets out how my needs will be met, as well as my wishes and choices' (HSCS 1.15).

This area for improvement was made on 12 September 2025.

Action taken since then

We found that inconsistencies remained in relation to meeting children's individual needs effectively. Monitoring carried out by the leadership team showed that the service had identified inconsistencies in staff practice in relation to ensuring children's needs were met effectively. For example, some children did not

have their needs clearly identified or relevant next steps in place to support progress (see section, Children are supported to achieve). We recognised that the service needs more time to fully implement planned actions to ensure children's individual needs met effectively.

This area for improvement has not been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

To enable children to receive consistent play, learning and development opportunities, which support them to reach their full potential. This should include, but is not limited to:

a) Embedding meaningful literacy and numeracy experiences within play experiences and daily routines to support children's progression.

b) Ensuring children experience high-quality interactions consistently to promote rich learning experiences and continuity of care.

c) Reviewing and improving transitions throughout the day to minimise disruption to children's play and learning, particularly during adult-led routines.

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 can direct my own play and activities in the way that I choose, and freely access a wide range of experiences and resources suitable for my age and stage, which stimulate my natural curiosity, learning and creativity" (HSCS 2.27).

This area for improvement was made on 12 September 2025.

Action taken since then

Opportunities for children to engage in some literacy and numeracy experiences were evident in some play areas. Recent improvements to indoor spaces and one outdoor space provided a greater variety of invitations to play which promoted children's level of engagement. The service was at initial stages of increasing opportunities for relevant and developmentally appropriate literacy and numeracy experiences across all play areas.

High-quality interactions to extend children's thinking, ideas and learning were not consistent. This resulted in missed opportunities for staff to scaffold and extend learning during play. The service had identified this as a key area for improvement. While initial steps had been taken, this work is at an early stage meaning it was too soon to evaluate impact on children's outcomes.

Children's engagement in play and learning had been considered when developing improvements to transitions at key times of the day. For example, the transition from play to lunch had been well planned to minimise waiting and disruption to play (see section, Children are supported to achieve).

This area for improvement has not been met.

Previous area for improvement 3

To ensure children's privacy and wellbeing, the service should ensure that there are systems in place to ensure that all children's information is processed, managed and stored securely. This should include but is not limited to ensuring that written documents correspond to the correct child's folder in learning journals.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

"I have confidence in people because they are trained, competent and skilled, are able to reflect on their practice and follow their professional and organisational codes" (HSCS 3.14) and:

"My environment is safe and secure." (HSCS 5.17)

This area for improvement was made on 12 September 2025.

Action taken since then

Children's care, privacy and wellbeing, are supported by systems in place which are consistently applied in practice. Monitoring procedures are effective, ensuring that information is accurately recorded and stored within the correct, designated folders. This demonstrates improved accountability and oversight.

Children's information is securely stored, which safeguards their privacy and maintains their dignity at all times. Staff demonstrate a clear understanding of their responsibilities in handling sensitive information, and records are managed in a way that promotes confidentiality.

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.scot.

Detailed evaluations

Leadership	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Leadership and management of staff and resources	4 - Good
Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

Children thrive and develop in quality spaces	4 - Good
Children experience high quality spaces	4 - Good

Children play and learn	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Playing, learning and developing	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

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

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Contact us

Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

enquiries@careinspectorate.gov.scot

0345 600 9527

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