Lairg Primary School Nursery
Day Care of Children

Lairg Primary School
Main Street
Lairg
IV27 4DD

Telephone: 01549 402 345

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
4 June 2026

Service provided by:
Highland Council

Service provider number:
SP2003001693

Service no:
CS2003017235

About the service

Lairg Primary School Nursery is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 30 children, from the age of three years to those not yet attending primary school. The nursery is operated by The Highland Council. The primary school head teacher is the registered manager of the nursery and is also responsible for another school. The nursery operates term time only. At the time of the inspection there were thirteen children in attendance.

The nursery is located within Lairg Primary School situated in the village of Lairg, Sutherland. The nursery premises consists of a large playroom, with direct access to an enclosed outdoor play area, which contains a range of loose parts and open-ended resources which extend and enrich the children's imaginative play and learning experiences.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Wednesday 3rd June 2026 with feedback on Thursday 4th June 2026. This 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 and complaints information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered throughout the inspection year.

To inform our evaluation we:

- spoke to children present during the inspection
- reviewed seven questionnaires completed by parents
- spoke with three staff and the manager
- 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 experienced high quality, nurturing and responsive care that supported their emotional wellbeing and development.
- Children were able to play and learn at their own pace, having fun as they explored the rich play experiences indoors and outdoors.
- Children were all very engaged in their play and learning, developing curiosity, creativity and problem solving skills.
- Play spaces were inviting, well resourced and reflected children's interests.
- Staff worked in close partnership with families to ensure children's individual needs were identified and included in their personal plan.
- A strong and meaningful system of quality assurance, self-evaluation and improvement had been developed and was having a positive impact on outcomes for children and their families.
- Management and staff were committed to ensuring they were a skilled and confident team who worked well together to provide a service of a high quality to children and their families.

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	4 - 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

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.

Leadership and management of staff and resources

The manager promoted a positive attitude to change and continuous improvement, and recognised the importance of working in partnership and involving all relevant stakeholders in self evaluation processes. Staff were positive about the service and felt included in the improvement journey, fostering a shared sense of responsibility and a positive team culture. Staff fully engaged with the inspection process and demonstrated a very positive attitude towards change and improvement. Staff confidently discussed the changes they had already introduced in the playroom and outdoors to improve outcomes and experiences for the children.

The service had developed a clear vision, values and aims which were meaningful and aspirational. They were clearly embedded in daily practice as staff promoted a warm, welcoming, inclusive environment where everyone felt respected, valued and included.
The vision, values and aims were clearly on display in the playroom and were shared with all families. The manager explained that they would be reviewing the vision, values and aims for the nursery in the new term to ensure they reflected the needs and wishes of children and their families. All relevant stakeholders would be invited to be involved in the review process.

Quality assurance and self evaluation was contributing towards the development of the service. As well as an improvement plan, there was a quality assurance calendar in place which covered key aspects of nursery provision and was effectively supporting the service to monitor practice and outcomes. This include monitoring interactions, experiences and the environment. These had identified strengths and where improvements could be made.

Ongoing self evaluation was taking place with good use being made of national frameworks to support this, for example 'A quality framework for the early learning and childcare sectors : early learning and childcare'. A collaborative approach to self-evaluation was embedded across the service with children, families staff actively encouraged to contribute to its development. Both staff and families commented that they felt very involved in the ongoing evaluation and development of the service.

During team meetings the manager and staff reflected on practice, discussed the continuous improvement of the service and progress in meeting identified action points, and securing progression and positive outcomes for children. They had made use of a floor book to record evidence of what progress they had made to meet any action points, identify improvements and reflect on how these had impacted on outcomes for children. We were able to see the improvements which had been made since the previous inspection and how they had impacted positively on children's experiences, their play, learning and development. One staff member commented that it was "motivating to look at ways we can improve the nursery through honest self evaluation and reflection. I think it has strengthened the team".

Parental engagement was an ongoing priority for the manager and staff. They recognised the value of parental feedback and welcomed any suggestions as to how the service could be improved. As well as daily informal contact during drop off and pick up times, parents were invited to spend time in the nursery and share in their child's care and learning. Parents confirmed that there were opportunities for them to be involved in the development of the service and felt listened to: "The school often ask for feedback and engage with me often about the service they provide", "Suggestions are always welcomed". The manager shared with families the actions taken in response to any of their feedback. This demonstrated to families how their views had directly influenced change and improvement within the setting.

The management demonstrated a good understanding of their responsibilities in relation to the management of staffing and resources. Robust recruitment processes were in place through the local authority, ensuring staff were safely appointed with appropriate checks completed. All staff were registered with the Scottish Social Services Council, supporting safe practice and ongoing professional learning across the setting. New staff benefitted from induction processes which supported them to develop their awareness of the setting and the needs of the children.

Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

Staff demonstrated a clear understanding of how children learn and develop and were very committed to supporting all children to play, learn and achieve. They were very caring and nurturing in their approach and they all had a good knowledge and understanding of the children's individual needs. Secure, positive attachments had been developed between children and staff. Parents were all complimentary about how friendly, approachable and caring the staff were.

Staff were positive about the service and felt supported by the management team. Staff engaged with the inspection process, demonstrating a positive attitude towards change and improvement. They were responsive to suggestions made during the inspection to continue to improve outcomes for children and families.

Staff had completed core professional training including first aid, food safety, health and safety and infection prevention and control training. This training helped to support children's wellbeing and enhance staff knowledge. Staff had completed child protection awareness training and ensured that they attended refresher training on a regular basis. Staff commented positively about the child protection training and how it made them more confident in understanding how to keep children safe.

Following the previous inspection, an area for improvement was made in relation to staff deployment. Deployment of staff across the setting and throughout the day supported children to lead their play and engage in free flow opportunities whilst remaining safe. Staff were providing good levels of supervision and support to children during mealtimes and snacks. There was very good communication between staff, they were flexible and supported each other. They communicated clearly with on another especially when they moved from one area to another or when additional support was needed. Staff also made good use of walkie talkies, particularly when some or all of the children were outdoors.

Children play and learn 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.

Playing, learning and developing

Children experienced a rich, engaging environment which supported their wellbeing and development. Staff had created play spaces that promoted curiosity, creativity and independence. Children were encouraged to lead their own play and freely explore a range of experiences and activities that supported their development and interests. Experiences were thoughtfully planned and responsive to children's ideas. This contributed to children being happy, confident, and independent learners who were engaged in meaningful play.

The service demonstrated a good understanding of how children learn and develop and this was reflected through experienced staff delivering high quality play experiences that supported children's confidence and progress in learning. This resulted in sustained levels of engagement, with children motivated and absorbed in their play as they explored and investigated through rich and challenging experiences.

Numeracy and literacy were embedded within practice and were woven throughout the various areas within the setting, both indoors and outdoors. Children were able to freely explore a range of well planned and responsive opportunities including counting, measuring, mark making and early reading. Resources, displays and conversations with staff encouraged children to be curious and naturally explore literacy, numeracy and mathematical concepts during their play. For example, some children were supported by a staff member during water play to investigate measuring, capacity and volume while another staff member had children engaged as they actively read a book chosen by the children.

Staff interactions were calm, respectful and responsive and were adding value to children's play and learning. Staff naturally engaged with children and skilfully supported learning through effective interactions, including commentary, open-ended questioning and wondering aloud. This promoted children's critical thinking, problem solving and creativity. Staff made informed decisions about when to step back to allow children to lead their own play and when to re-engage to offer support, spark curiosity and sustain involvement

Children experienced a child centred approach to planning which reflected their interests, developmental stages and individual needs. This ensured activities were meaningful and engaging for children. Well thought out wall displays allowed children and their parents to see what the current interests were. Good use was made of the children's art work and mark making, and photographs to illustrate what the children had learned. There were also floor books which were being used to record children's voice and how their interests were extended and developed. The service recognised the need to continue to develop systems for planning. For example, the service should ensure that children's achievements and next steps are used to inform planning.

Since the previous inspection, staff had attended training in relation to the observation and monitoring of children's learning and the identification of next steps. The observations shared with families clearly identified individual children's learning and achievements. They were meaningful and summarized the individual child's learning, as well as identifying next steps. The service made use of an online app to share children's learning. Parents enjoyed receiving the updates. One parent commented, "The nursery are amazing at updating and sharing on seesaw". The manager stated that following feedback from families, they were looking at how they could improve ease of access to the system for families. Children also had a learning journal folder in the playroom to which they could add examples of their work. Children were proud of their journals and their achievements.

Children are supported to achieve 5 - Very Good

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.

Nurturing Care and support

Children benefitted from a warm, welcoming and inclusive environment where staff interactions were nurturing, caring and responsive. Positive relationships were evident, with staff knowing children well and responding sensitively to their individual needs. Staff demonstrated warm, respectful and caring interactions with children which supported them to feel safe, secure and confident. Appropriate comfort, cuddles and reassurance was offered, supporting emotional wellbeing. Children confidently approached staff for help, support and comfort, showing that they felt safe and listened to. Parents made very positive comments about the nursery staff and how welcoming and nurturing they were.

Transitions were carefully planned and responsive to individual needs. Strong links with the wider community and school ensured children experienced continuity and familiarity and developed their sense of belonging. Opportunities to access shared school spaces and resources supported a smooth transition into primary school. School staff visited the nursery to build early relationships and help children to feel confident, reassured and ready for school.

Children's wellbeing was supported through effective and meaningful personal planning. Each child had a personal plan which supported staff to meet their needs. Plans were made in collaboration with parents and included key information which supported staff to meet their needs. Parents confirmed that they were fully involved in developing and reviewing their child's personal plan to reflect progress and changes in children's lives. All staff were very knowledgeable about children's needs, including allergies and dietary preferences. They had a strong understanding of individual children and how to support them effectively. Staff worked closely with families and other professionals to identify strategies and goals to support children with additional support needs. This supported staff to provide care and support that was right for all children. As a result, all children were making progress at a pace that was right for them.

Snack and mealtimes were relaxed, sociable and inclusive with healthy food provided in line with guidance. Children were offered opportunities to develop their independence and life skills, for example pouring their drinks, self serving snacks and tidying away their dishes. This created a sense of responsibility. Staff sat with children during mealtimes encouraging healthy habits, providing gentle support and encouraging children in social conversations.

The manager and staff recognised the importance of working in partnership with families and how this impacted positively on outcomes for children. Strong working relationships with parents promoted and supported good communication and information sharing which in turn supported consistency and continuity of care for children. Connections were strengthened through meaningful family engagement opportunities, such as, stay and play sessions and parents meetings, as well as an open-door approach. Parents were all very positive in their comments about how welcome everyone was made to feel at the nursery and the strength of their relationship with staff. One parent commented "I was recently asked to come and do a talk about my work which was really enjoyable for me and the kids- a great way to explore different topics".

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 positive outcomes for children, the provider should ensure that personal planning enables each child to receive appropriate care and support to meet their needs; and

a) Ensure personal plans set out children's current needs and how they will be met.

b) Ensure all staff are aware of and understand the information within the personal plans and use this to effectively meet each child's needs.

c) Ensure staff are competent in completing chronologies and use these to take appropriate action to support children and their families.

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 8 May 2025.

Action taken since then

Following the previous inspection, the manager and the staff had reviewed and developed the personal plans and the information they held for each of the children attending the service.

We looked at the personal plans for several children who attended the nursery. The personal plans were now clear and contained appropriate information that set out the current needs, wishes and choices of children and how they would be met. They had been created in partnership with parents and carers.

We saw how staff used information in the personal plans to support children and meet their needs effectively. Personal plans and protocols were stored safely and were easily available for staff, ensuring confidentiality was maintained.

This area for improvement has now been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

To improve outcomes for children and families, the management team should ensure that a strong ethos of continuous improvement is established.

This should include but not limited to:

a) developing robust quality assurance systems

b) implementing effective audits

c) developing monitoring processes to support a cycle of improvement.

This is in order to ensure that 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 8 May 2025.

Action taken since then

Management and staff demonstrated a strong commitment to reflective practice and continuous improvement. Following the last inspection, the manager had put in place robust systems of quality assurance to monitor the quality and consistency of the service. All stakeholders were actively encouraged to be involved in self evaluation processes. There was evidence to support that these processes were becoming embedded in practice and leading to sustained improvements across the service.

Thorough monitoring and auditing was taking place to support evaluation and drive forward improvement. For example, there were regular audits of accident and incidents to minimise risk, regular audits of the a administration of medication records to ensure policy and procedures were being followed, and the regular audit of personal plans to ensure children's wellbeing and individual needs were known and being supported. Monitoring of the nursery, including the environment and staff practice were also taking place on a regular basis with a focus on improvements and enhancing outcomes for children

This area for improvement has now been met.

Previous area for improvement 3

To ensure children are safe and receive high quality experiences at all times the provider and manager should as a minimum, review and make appropriate changes to staff deployment, to improve experiences for children.

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).

This area for improvement was made on 8 May 2025.

Action taken since then

There was an appropriate number of staff working in the nursery. Deployment of staff across the setting and throughout the day supported children to lead their play and engage in free flow opportunities. There were sufficient numbers of staff to supervise and support children to ensure they were safe at all times, including while outdoors and during mealtimes and snacks.

There was good communication between staff, they were flexible and supported each other. They communicated clearly with one another especially when they moved from one area to another or when additional support was needed.

This area for improvement has now 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	5 - Very Good
Leadership and management of staff and resources	5 - Very Good
Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment	5 - Very Good

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

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

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