South Lodge Primary School Nursery
Day Care of Children

South Lodge Primary School
Castle Road
Invergordon
IV18 0LW

Telephone: 01349 852 521

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
10 September 2026

Service provided by:
Highland Council

Service provider number:
SP2003001693

Service no:
CS2003017267

About the service

South Lodge Primary School Nursery is operated by The Highland Council and is based in the grounds of South Lodge Primary School, Invergordon. South Lodge Primary School Nursery is registered to provide a day care service to a maximum of 40 children aged 3 years to those not yet of an age to attend primary school.

The accommodation provided is within two main rooms with access to a spacious outdoor play area. The outdoor play area 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 8 September 2026 between 09:00 and 16:30 and 9 September 2026 between 09:00 and 12:00. Feedback was shared with the service on 10 September 2026. 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, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

- spent time with children using the service;
- received 4 completed questionnaires from parents/carers;
- received 6 completed questionnaires from staff;
- spoke with staff and management;
- 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 experienced warm, nurturing care from staff who knew them well.
- Children benefitted from regular access to a large outdoor space to support their health and wellbeing.
- The setting had identified observation, planning and tracking children's progress as priorities for improvement to better support children's learning and development.
- Staff contributed well to improvements and were committed to developing the service.
- Strong partnerships with families and the local community increased parental involvement, supporting children's learning and wellbeing.
- Management demonstrated a commitment to improvement and should ensure actions are fully implemented and evaluated for impact.

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	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 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.

Quality indicator: Leadership and management of resources

The manager and staff fully engaged in the inspection process. They demonstrated their commitment to the service and were motivated to make improvements to ensure positive outcomes for children. This was highlighted by the improvements which had been put in place since the previous inspection. Children benefitted from a management and staff team who were committed to providing a quality service.

The service displayed their vision, values and aims statement in the nursery cloakroom, encouraging people's awareness of what to expect from the provision. This practice reflects an understanding of the importance of shared values in shaping high-quality provision. The service was responding positively to changes in the nursery by reviewing its vision, values and aims. Involving children and families in shaping these shared priorities would help ensure they reflect the views and aspirations of the nursery community. This would further strengthen a sense of belonging, inclusion and partnership across the service.

The manager has begun to allocate dedicated time each week to lead and manage the service, which is a positive step toward strengthening leadership capacity. Clear roles and responsibilities have been established, reflecting an emerging structure to support effective management. An action plan for improvement had been implemented following the previous inspection. While self-evaluation was at an early stage, the management team demonstrated a clear understanding of its importance. The management team and staff had started to consider how this would be embedded using the new "A quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors: childminding". Engaging in regular self-evaluation and quality assurance processes would support continuous improvement and help promote positive outcomes for children and families. Self-evaluation and quality assurance process were more planned and focused, with clear and achievable improvement priorities identified, including enhancements to children's experiences and the play environment.

Opportunities for parents to provide feedback on the service included surveys, Seesaw app and stay and play sessions. Feedback from families was routinely gathered and used to inform improvement planning around the environment in the nursery. Most parents spoke positively about the service and felt listened to and able to raise issues. While positive relationships with parents had been established, there was scope to further enhance communication at drop-off and pick-up times and increase opportunities for parental involvement in the service. Management had identified this as an area for improvement and agreed actions to strengthen communication with parents, supporting greater engagement and stronger partnerships with families.

Staff felt supported by the management team who they described as being very approachable
Staff advised that they felt actively involved in the ongoing evaluation and development of the service. They spoke positively about the changes made and the value placed on their ideas within staff meetings. 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.

Staff recruitment, induction, and mentoring processes were effective in supporting a confident and competent workforce. Staff described a strong and supportive team culture, which contributed to the consistent delivery of high-quality care, play, and learning experiences for children.

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.

Quality Indicator: Playing, learning and developing

Children were busy and having fun as they played both indoors and outdoors. Children were observed being engaged, happy and motivated as they confidently explored the various play experiences which were developmentally appropriate and reflected their current interests. The pace of the session was unhurried and we saw children confidently leading their own play and learning. For the majority of the time, children benefitted from uninterrupted play, allowing them to be engaged in their play in a purposeful and meaningful way.

Staff supported children's learning through warm and responsive interactions. The learning environment supported the development of early numeracy, and literacy. Singing, storytelling and meaningful conversations helped develop children's confidence, language and thinking skills. Staff confidently used a range of effective language strategies for example, open-ended questions and conversations that encouraged children to think, predict and explore possibilities. For example, staff actively took part in a singing and musical activity, while others supported a messy play activity. This encouraged and extended imaginative play, creativity and emerging communication skills. However we identified some missed opportunities when skilled interactions and effective questioning could have further extended curiosity, problem-solving skills and promote development of imagination.

Some opportunities for exploratory and risky play were available; however, these were not consistently embedded throughout children's experiences. As a result, opportunities for children to develop confidence, resilience, problem-solving skills and independence through challenge and managed risk were variable. This was particularly evident during outdoor play, where staff interactions were often more focused on supervision and tasks due to the layout of the garden than extending children's exploration and learning. Further development of these experiences would help ensure children benefit from consistent opportunities for challenge, exploration and appropriate risk-taking, leading to improved outcomes.

The setting had identified observation, planning and tracking children's progress as areas for improvement. Children's ideas and interests were captured in floor books and used to inform meaningful play and learning opportunities. Observations of learning were regularly recorded and demonstrated progression in children's next steps, supporting continuity and ensuring individual learning needs were effectively met. For example, a focus on strengthening interactions, observations and the tracking of children's progress had supported
staff to reflect on and improve their practice through relevant training. Although improvements were still being embedded, staff were enthusiastic and motivated to drive forward developments in observation and next-step planning, demonstrating a positive capacity for improvement.

Children's opportunities for play and learning were enhanced through strong connections to their own and wider communities. These included trips to the woodland area, local park and natural spaces. This supported children to feel part of their community.

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.

Quality indicator: Nurturing care and support

Staff demonstrated a strong understanding of each child's individual care needs, enabling them to provide responsive and nurturing support. Staff were kind, caring and nurturing in their approach. Warm and caring interactions helped children feel safe, valued, and secure. Staff offered praise, reassurance, and comfort when needed, contributing positively to children's wellbeing, confidence, and emotional development. Parents were overall happy with the care their child received. Comments included:

'Staff are always welcoming and have made time to discuss things with me when I have concerns'
'Supportive, warm and welcoming staff who genuinely care'
'They have staff members that are brilliant and so welcoming and help with queries'

Effective personal planning supported children to meet their potential. Staff spoke knowledgably and confidently about children's individual care needs and what they did to support them. Each child had a personal plan outlining their care wellbeing needs, which was regularly reviewed with families to ensure information remained current and relevant. This contributed to a consistent approach to care and support for each child.

Snacks and mealtimes were positive, social experiences. They were relaxed and unhurried, allowing children to enjoy eating and chatting with friends. Children were provided with home cooked lunches which took account of children's allergies and dietary requirements. Independence was promoted as children helped to prepare snack, collected their plates and self served their food, giving them a sense of responsibility and ownership of routines. Staff sat and ate lunch alongside the children, creating a calm and social mealtime experience that fostered secure, positive relationships. Fresh water was available to the children throughout the session and they were encouraged to keep hydrated.

Transitions were flexible and tailored to individual needs, with staff working closely with parents to support settling-in arrangements and play and stay sessions. Daily routines were well managed, helping children feel secure and confident within the setting. Children were encouraged to develop independence through meaningful responsibilities, such as helping to check the garden before outdoor play, which promoted confidence, responsibility, and active participation.

Strong family partnerships were effectively promoted through a range of meaningful engagement opportunities within the community, resulting in increased parental involvement. Parents were warmly welcomed into the setting through Bookbug sessions, library visits, and Stay and Play sessions, which encouraged positive relationships and active participation in their children's learning. One parent commented "My child has been on visits to the library, book big sessions and trips outwith the setting". Another parent commented "staff are always welcoming and have made time to discuss things with me when I have concerns". These approaches successfully strengthened trust and collaboration between staff and families, resulting in parents feeling valued and actively involved in their children's wellbeing and development.

Medication was stored securely and administered in line with best practice. We found that staff and management knew their responsibility regarding safe medication administration. This helped keep children safe.

Staff understood their roles and responsibilities to keep children safe and protected from harm. They could confidently tell us how they would respond if they had any child protection concerns. This contributed to keeping children safe.

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's wellbeing, development needs and progress, being effectively met, children's personal plans should be further developed and streamlined.

This should include but is not limited to:
a) Plans should be reviewed and updated as children's needs, challenges and achievements change, or at least every six months in line with legislation.
b) All staff are knowledgeable about each child's health and wellbeing needs and that tailored care and support strategies are provided and used effectively to meet those needs.

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 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 30 October 2025.

Action taken since then
Effective personal planning ensured children's individual health, wellbeing and safety needs were consistently met. Plans were regularly reviewed and updated to reflect children's changing needs, achievements and emerging priorities. Staff demonstrated a knowledge and understanding of each child's care and support requirements and were confident in discussing how these were being met in practice. As a result, children experienced consistent care and were well supported to make progress and achieve their potential

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

To effectively deliver high quality play and learning experiences, the manager should support staff to access training appropriate to their role and apply the training to their practice.

This should include but is not limited to:
a) How to complete meaningful high quality observations.
b) Reporting and recording children's progress and identifying meaningful next steps.
c) Using best practice guidance to support high quality interactions and play experiences.

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

'I experience high quality care and support based on relevant evidence, guidance and best practice' (HSCS 4.11)

This area for improvement was made on 30 October 2025.

Action taken since then

Planning and assessment processes were becoming more effective in supporting children's progress. Staff had completed training around interactions and observations. Floor books were being used effectively to capture children's voices, ideas, and spontaneous planning. Observations of learning were regularly recorded and demonstrated progression in children's next steps, supporting continuity and ensuring individual learning needs were effectively met.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 3

To support the effective running of the service, the provider should ensure that the manager allocates time each week to effectively manage and lead the care service provided.

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

'I use a service and organisation that are well led and managed'. (HSCS, 4.23).

This area for improvement was made on 30 October 2025.

Action taken since then

The manager has demonstrated progress in strengthening leadership capacity by allocating dedicated time each week to oversee and manage the service. This has contributed to a more consistent management presence and provides greater opportunity for strategic oversight

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 4

To support children's wellbeing and promote the continued development and improvement of the service, the manager should ensure robust quality assurance systems are in place.

This should include but is not limited to:
a) Regular opportunities for reflection and self-evaluation of practice.
b) Regular monitoring of the quality of children's experiences and care.
c) Auditing all children's information recorded, including accident and medication information, ensuring this corresponds between recording formats.
d) Regular monitoring of staff practice to identify good quality skills and practice as well as training needs.

This is 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 30 October 2025.

Action taken since then

The manager had effective systems in place to check and improve the quality of the service. Regular reviews of children's learning records, observations and next steps had begun, helping to ensure children were making progress and receiving appropriate support. Children's information was being audited to improve the quality and accuracy of records. 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.

The manager had introduced planned supervision and support for staff, providing opportunities to reflect on practice, recognise effective approaches and identify areas for further professional development.

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	4 - Good
Leadership and management of staff and resources	4 - 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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