Tarbat Old Primary School Nursery
Day Care of Children

Tarbat Old Primary School
Tarbartness Road
Portmahomack
Tain
IV20 1YA

Telephone: 01862 871 536

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
25 August 2026

Service provided by:
Highland Council

Service provider number:
SP2003001693

Service no:
CS2003017276

About the service

Tarbat Old Primary School Nursery is situated in the village of Portmahomack. The service is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 17 children aged from three years to not yet attending primary school at any one time. Five children were present during the inspection. Children have access to a large playroom with a dedicated kitchen/dining area and toilets, and a large, enclosed outdoor garden area. The service is close to the local church, beach and pond.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 24 August 2026 between 09:45 and 16:30. Feedback was shared with the service on 25 August 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, registration information, information submitted by the service, and intelligence gathered since the last inspection. To inform our evaluations we:

- Spent time with children using the service
- spoke with staff and management
- spoke with two parents
- 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 benefited from high-quality interactions with caring staff who knew them and their families well.
• A broad range of developmentally appropriate play experiences supported children's curiosity, engagement, and overall development.
• Children enjoyed leading their own play and learning in a variety of spaces which were well resourced and laid out.
• Increasing the frequency and consistency of individual staff review meetings would support ongoing professional development.
• Further embedding self-evaluation and reflective practice would help to drive continuous improvement and enhance outcomes for children and 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	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.

The manager and staff demonstrated a strong commitment to continuous improvement and providing high-quality experiences for children and families. The service had reviewed its vision, values and aims, simplifying them to focus on being kind, reaching goals, being included and being responsible. Families were involved in this process through consultation opportunities, helping to ensure the values reflected the needs of the nursery community.

There was clear evidence of engagement with best practice guidance to support improvement. Staff were familiar with the Quality Improvement Framework and were developing confidence in using it to support self-evaluation. Guidance from Realising the Ambition was reflected throughout the environment, including approaches to promoting children's wellbeing and self-regulation. Cosy spaces had been thoughtfully created to support children's rights and wellbeing, enabling them to access areas where they felt safe, secure and supported.

Self-evaluation processes were beginning to drive improvement across the setting. Staff regularly reviewed learning environments and experiences, making changes to reflect children's interests and learning needs. Children's profiles and floorbooks were audited, with feedback provided to promote consistency and quality. Parent questionnaires, including those focused on settling-in experiences, informed service improvements. Staff also engaged in professional learning through visits to another nursery and valued opportunities to share effective practice.

Partnerships with families were a key strength. One parent told us, "The stay and play sessions have been great, I have attended them all. The treasure hunt to find shapes with your child was a really good one." The open-door approach, stay-and-play sessions and regular communication supported family involvement in children's learning and experiences.

The sharing of effective practice took place through discussion and informal monitoring. More formal systems for recording staff practice observations would further strengthen quality assurance and professional learning. While accident and incident audits were completed, ensuring medication audits were consistently recorded, signed and dated would enhance monitoring arrangements.

New staff described the induction process as thorough and supportive. Dedicated time with the manager helped them become familiar with policies, procedures and expectations. Staff reported feeling well supported, increasingly confident in their role and welcomed by both the manager and wider team.

Children play and learn 5 - Very Good

Quality Indicator: Play, learning and development

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore we evaluated this quality indicator as very good.

Children experienced high-quality play and learning opportunities throughout the nursery. The welcoming, stimulating and well-resourced environment supported children's learning and development. Opportunities to develop early literacy and numeracy skills were embedded across the setting, with readily available mark-making materials and purposeful numeracy experiences. Resources were plentiful and clearly labelled with pictures and symbols, supporting communication, early literacy and independence.

Children were curious, motivated learners who benefited from rich opportunities for imaginative and creative play. Open-ended resources, including water, jugs, magnifying glasses and natural materials, encouraged investigation, experimentation and independent exploration. Outdoor learning was particularly well developed, with regular opportunities for children to engage with the natural environment in ways that promoted curiosity and discovery.

Children benefited from a wide range of outdoor and community learning experiences. Regular visits to places such as the Discovery Centre, the beach and the local pond helped develop a strong sense of belonging while extending children's understanding of the world around them. Staff were also developing children's knowledge of their local community through map-making activities with families contributing information such as photographs to help children identify where they lived.

Staff interactions were warm, nurturing and responsive. Practitioners engaged meaningfully with children, using open-ended questions, explanations and wondering aloud to extend thinking and language development. During an outdoor experience searching for worms, a member of staff skilfully encouraged investigation by asking questions such as, "Where can we find more?" and "What do we need to make a new home?" Staff extended learning further by introducing new vocabulary and encouraging children to test their own ideas before stepping back to allow them time to explore independently. This approach effectively supported children's critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Staff demonstrated a good understanding of child development and adapted their approaches to meet children's individual needs, ensuring children were included and supported to make progress. During observations, children were seen engaging collaboratively in a Perspex painting outdoor experience, demonstrating sustained engagement, cooperation and enjoyment.

Planning and assessment processes were child-centred and responsive. Floorbooks effectively captured children's voices and demonstrated how their interests influenced future experiences. Staff made good use of intentional and responsive planning, linking learning to children's next steps, wellbeing needs, rights and curriculum outcomes. This helped ensure experiences were meaningful, personalised and responsive to children's interests and stages of development.

Children are supported to achieve — 5 - Very Good

Quality Indicator: Nurturing Care and support

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore we evaluated this quality indicator as very good.

The nursery provided a warm, caring and nurturing environment where children felt safe, valued and supported. Due to the smaller nature of the setting, staff developed strong relationships with children and demonstrated a detailed understanding of their individual personalities, interests and needs.

Throughout the visit, interactions were consistently warm, responsive and respectful. Children appeared comfortable seeking support from staff and frequently invited them to join in their play and conversations.

Children's dignity and privacy were well respected. Staff worked closely with families to support individual care needs, including toileting and potty training, using flexible approaches that reflected each child's stage of development. Where additional support was required, staff worked in partnership with families and relevant professionals to ensure children's needs were met effectively.

The environment supported both social interaction and opportunities for rest and relaxation. Staff promoted emotional wellbeing through sensitive and responsive interactions. For example, when a newly settled child became upset at lunchtime, staff provided reassurance, acknowledged their feelings and offered alternatives, helping them feel listened to, respected and emotionally supported.

Mealtimes were relaxed, sociable and unhurried experiences that promoted independence and confidence. Children identified their own place settings, poured their own drinks and helped themselves to food such as vegetables at lunchtime. Food temperatures were appropriately monitored and recorded to ensure children's safety. Snack experiences were flexible and organised in a way that minimised disruption to children's play and learning.

Children developed valuable life skills through daily routines and opportunities to take responsibility. For example, children took turns as snack helpers, supporting preparation tasks and contributing to the smooth running of the nursery. One child worked alongside an adult to collect flowers from the garden and arranged them in a vase for the snack table, developing a sense of responsibility and pride.

Personal plans reflected children's individual needs, interests and strengths and were reviewed regularly in partnership with families. Termly discussions during stay-and-play sessions provided opportunities for parents to contribute to reviewing and updating information. Children's interests were used effectively to inform care and learning experiences. For example, one child's interest in insects was supported through outdoor experiences that encouraged exploration, investigation and social interaction.

Settling-in arrangements were flexible and tailored to individual family needs. Staff worked closely with parents and children during transitions, adapting approaches to help children feel safe and secure. One parent told us that, "My child settled in well and was able to do half days to begin. Staff are very flexible." Families were invited to provide feedback through questionnaires, supporting ongoing evaluation and improvement of the process.

The environment was safe and secure, with effective measures in place to protect children. Staff used radios to support communication and headcounts, while alarmed doors and secure garden access further promoted children's safety and wellbeing. The team demonstrated a strong commitment to providing an environment that responded effectively to children's individual needs.

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	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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