Cowie Nursery
Day Care of Children

St Margaret's Primary School and Cowie Nursery
McSherry Court
Cowie
Stirling
FK7 7FE

Telephone: 01786 237 954

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
10 July 2026

Service provided by:
Stirling Council

Service provider number:
SP2003002689

Service no:
CS2003043672

About the service

Cowie Nursery is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 96 children aged from birth to primary school age.

The service is provided by Stirling Council and is located in Cowie, Stirling. It operates from purpose-built premises shared with St. Margaret's Primary School. Community spaces within the building provide additional opportunities for children to engage with the local community and participate in a range of activities and experiences beyond the nursery environment.

The setting benefits from a dedicated entrance area and two spacious playrooms, each with direct access to a large outdoor garden space that promote active play and learning. The service also makes use of the on-site community hall for physical play and larger group activities.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 8 July 2026 between 9:00 and 17:50 and 9 July 2026 between 08:00 and 15:00. Feedback was shared with the service on 10 July 2026. The 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 since the last inspection.

To inform our evaluation we:

- spent time with children using the service
- received feedback from three families of children who attend the service
- spoke with staff and the management team
- spoke with five families in person
- assessed core assurances, including the physical environment.
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.
- spoke with one visiting professional.

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 relationships with caring staff who knew them well and supported them to feel safe, valued and confident.
- Strong leadership and a positive culture of continuous improvement contributed to high-quality experiences and positive outcomes for children and families.
- Children benefited from rich, child-led learning opportunities, with an effective outdoor environment promoting curiosity, creativity, independence and wellbeing.
- Staff used skilled interactions, responsive planning and effective partnership working to promote children's learning, development and achievement.
- Personalised support, carefully planned transitions and nurturing approaches promoted confidence, resilience and emotional wellbeing.
- Strong partnerships with families, schools and the wider community enhanced children's experiences, strengthened inclusion and promoted 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

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.

We experienced a warm and welcoming atmosphere on arrival. Children confidently led us on a tour of the nursery, proudly sharing their environment and what mattered most to them. This showed that children's views were valued and embedded in the life of the setting.

Management changes had taken place over time. These transitions were managed effectively, maintaining a clear focus on improvement and providing consistency for children, families and staff. As a result, relationships, routines and improvement priorities remained well supported throughout the period of change.

The nursery's values of respect, care, honesty and partnership had been developed in consultation with children, families and staff. Parents and carers described responsive support and strong partnership working, with one sharing, "There is excellent communication with a person-centred approach." This reflected that the nursery's values were embedded in practice and experienced positively by families.

Staff demonstrated a strong commitment to continuous improvement. Self-evaluation was well established, with children and parents central to improvement processes. One parent told us, "I feel the nursery and staff members are very committed to developing my child as an individual and are keen to welcome my own views and suggestions." Staff actively sought and responded to feedback, adapting aspects of the service to better meet families' needs. Improvement planning, audits and reflection helped identify priorities and supported a clear understanding of strengths and areas for development.

An improvement plan and quality assurance calendar supported ongoing development. Staff regularly used reflection, audits and self-evaluation tools to identify priorities for improvement. As a result, they had a clear understanding of the service's strengths and the areas requiring further development.

Distributed leadership was well established, with staff taking responsibility for improvement and contributing to professional learning. Staff described a supportive learning culture and spoke confidently about their roles and contributions.

Opportunities to share practice, participate in networks, create frameworks and reflect on recorded interactions strengthened staffs' confidence and supported improvements in outcomes for children.

Policies and risk assessments supported safe practice. Leaders proactively monitored incidents, identified trends and made changes to reduce risks and improve children's safety.

Staff reported that induction had prepared them well to support child-centred practice, engage with families and meet safeguarding responsibilities. As a result, they felt confident in meeting the diverse needs of children and families.

Regular appraisals, one-to-one meetings and wellbeing discussions provided opportunities for reflection and

support. Staff told us they felt listened to, valued and supported by leaders.

Professional Development Reviews provided a useful framework for identifying professional learning priorities and supporting staff development. There was scope to demonstrate more clearly how professional learning influenced practice and improved outcomes for children and families.

Parents spoke positively about staff retention and the consistency this provided. They also valued opportunities to contribute to recruitment processes. This demonstrated the nursery's commitment to meaningful partnership working and ensuring families played an active role in shaping the service.

Children play and learn 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.

Children demonstrated they could lead their own play and make choices about how they learned. During outdoor play, one child explained how they had adapted the obstacle course by moving resources and creating a new route. They confidently shared their ideas and learning, demonstrating positive, responsive interactions and ownership of their learning.

The outdoor environment was a significant strength. Children benefited from a spacious, stimulating and well-resourced garden that supported exploration, creativity, physical development and curiosity. Natural and open-ended resources promoted wellbeing, independence and problem-solving, while staff ensured outdoor learning was central to daily experiences. As a result, children were highly engaged, confident and independent learners.

Staff provided appropriate challenge through open-ended questioning, encouraging children to think critically, solve problems and extend their learning. They modelled and enriched language effectively, adapting communication to meet individual stages of development and support vocabulary and understanding. Books were readily accessible, enabling children to independently choose, share and enjoy stories while developing a love of reading.

Environmental audits were regularly undertaken to review the quality, accessibility and effectiveness of resources and learning spaces, helping staff identify strengths and areas for improvement. To build on this, we suggested seeking more direct feedback from children and evaluating engagement and wellbeing to ensure environments continued to reflect their interests and preferences.

Planning was child-led, with children's interests, voices and next steps shaping experiences. Staff used skilled scaffolding and targeted opportunities to extend learning and support progress. Visual displays of skills helped children recognise and celebrate their achievements in age-appropriate ways, encouraging them to talk about their progress and next steps. Floor books helped children recognise, celebrate and revisit their learning. We discussed the need for planning to be clearly dated to support effective monitoring and evaluation.

Play-based focus groups provided targeted support and challenge, helping staff build on children's strengths and develop specific skills. The tracking and monitoring toolkit, alongside Meeting Learning Needs meetings, supported the identification of individual needs and informed planning. We discussed recording focus groups, support provided and the impact of interventions within the toolkit to evidence progress and inform future approaches.

Guidebooks had been developed to support staff in evaluating the quality of children's learning experiences and increasing awareness of best practice guidance and improvement tools. These resources supported consistency and helped reflections on high-quality practice.

Learning journals and daily communication enabled staff and families to share children's interests and extend learning across home and nursery. Staff regularly reflected on children's engagement, progress and wellbeing, adapting experiences in response to changing needs and interests to ensure learning remained meaningful and child centred.

Staff worked effectively with other professionals to support children's learning and development. Specialist advice, visual supports and communication strategies were embedded in practice, with resources also developed for home use to promote consistency.

Families were encouraged to contribute to their child's learning through a range of formal and informal opportunities. By sharing interests, ideas and learning journal contributions, they helped strengthen home-nursery partnerships and support children's ongoing progress.

Children are supported to achieve — 5 - Very Good

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.

We observed a warm, nurturing and inclusive environment where children felt safe, respected and valued. Children's wellbeing and individual needs were at the heart of practice, with caring and responsive staff fostering positive relationships and supporting children to achieve their full potential. Parents spoke positively about the service, commenting, "They are always showing an interest in my child as an individual. I feel very fortunate", and "Cannot fault them for care and support." These strong relationships helped children feel secure, confident and valued.

Calm, welcoming spaces helped children regulate their emotions and recharge. Mindfulness and relaxation activities, such as yoga, breathing exercises and storytelling, were part of daily routines. Practitioners supported children to recognise and manage their feelings, building confidence, resilience and emotional wellbeing. Comfortable sleep and rest arrangements were also available. As a result, children felt secure, settled and better able to engage in their learning and play.

Home visits supported positive relationships and personalised transitions. Parents told us transitions "could not have gone better." As a result, children settled quickly and engaged confidently in nursery life.

Transitions within the nursery and to school were carefully planned and responsive to individual needs, helping children feel secure and confident. Initiatives such as Resilient Kids demonstrated a personalised approach to transitions, supporting confidence and emotional wellbeing. Children also benefited from access to school spaces, including the gym hall and trim trail, strengthening their sense of belonging within the school community.

Mealtimes were calm and sociable, providing opportunities for children to communicate and develop independence. Staff demonstrated a strong awareness of children's health, safety and wellbeing. Dietary

and allergy information was clearly recorded and shared, supporting safe practice and continuity of care.

Medication procedures were supported by parental consent and regular reviews, helping to ensure children's health needs were managed safely. Records were well maintained, and we discussed opportunities to strengthen documentation further through the use of clearer and more consistent language.

Personal care routines were embedded throughout the day, supporting children's health, wellbeing and growing independence. We discussed reviewing aspects of the environment, including access to toilet facilities and visibility within the changing area, to further support children's independence, comfort and privacy.

Personal plans were used effectively to provide individualised support that reflected children's strengths and needs. Plans were regularly reviewed with families and adapted where required. They evidenced clear strategies and supports, which were consistently shared with families to ensure continuity between home and nursery. As a result, personal plans supported positive outcomes and remained responsive to the needs of children and families.

Families valued the setting and its strong community links. Community partnerships, walks, library visits and minibus outings enriched children's experiences and learning. Staff supported local toddler and Bookbug groups, promoting family connections, communication and belonging.

The setting demonstrated a strong commitment to family engagement, with staff working closely with families and partner agencies to support children's individual needs. Parents valued the open, welcoming approach of staff and effective communication through newsletters, notice boards and social media. This nurturing approach helped families feel informed, valued and involved in their child's learning, development and care.

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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