Dalry Early Years Centre
Day Care of Children

Sharon Street
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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
4 September 2025

Service provided by:
North Ayrshire Council

Service provider number:
SP2003003327

Service no:
CS2003044483

About the service

Dalry Early Years Centre provides a daycare of children's service to a maximum of 90 children: no more than 30 children aged 0-3 years, and no more than 60 children aged 3 years to those not yet attending primary school.

At the time of the inspection, 64 children were registered with the service. During the inspection visit, across morning and afternoon sessions, eight children aged 2-3 and 40 children aged 3-5 attended on the first day, and eight children aged 2-3 and 46 children aged 3-5 attended on the second day.

Dalry Early Years Centre is provided by North Ayrshire Council and is based within the Dalry Primary School campus. The service is located close to local amenities, including shops, schools, and bus routes.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Tuesday 2 September 2025 between 09:30 and 16:35, Wednesday 3 September 2025 between 09:45 and 16:45, and Thursday 4 September 2025 between 08:40 and 14:30. Feedback was provided to the service on Thursday 4 September 2025. 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 throughout the inspection year. In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with children using the service
- spoke with six parents and carers
- received 24 completed Microsoft Forms questionnaires
- spoke with staff and the senior leadership team
- spoke with four visiting professionals
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

As part of this inspection we undertook a focus area. We have gathered specific information to help us understand more about how services support children's safety, wellbeing and engagement in their play and learning. This included reviewing the following aspects:

- staff deployment
- safety of the physical environment, indoors and outdoors
- the quality of personal plans and how well children's needs are being met
- children's engagement with the experiences provided in their setting.

This information will be anonymised and analysed to help inform our future work with services.

Key messages

- Children were safe, secure, and emotionally supported, helping them to feel confident and settled in the nursery.
- Children's individual needs were well understood and planned for through effective personal planning and regular reviews.
- Children who required additional support received timely and effective intervention, promoting their communication, social development, and overall wellbeing.
- Children experienced rich and varied play opportunities indoors and outdoors, which supported their creativity, problem-solving, and independent decision-making.
- Staff interactions were warm, respectful, and purposeful, helping to extend children's thinking and deepen engagement in learning.
- Planning for learning was responsive and intentional, reflecting children's interests and supporting their progress across key areas of development.
- Children benefited from a safe, clean, and well-organised environment that supported their health and wellbeing.
- Indoor and outdoor spaces were thoughtfully arranged to promote independence, creativity, and meaningful play.
- Leadership was strong and improvement-focused, with senior staff actively engaging in self-evaluation and demonstrating a clear commitment to achieving positive outcomes for children.
- Staff skills and leadership opportunities were used effectively to enrich experiences and strengthen family partnerships.
- Strong teamwork and communication supported continuous improvement and high-quality care.

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

How good is our care, play and learning?	5 - Very Good
How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good

How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good

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

How good is our care, play and learning? 5 - Very Good

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

Quality indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support

Staff demonstrated a warm, kind, and nurturing approach towards children, which contributed to a positive atmosphere within the setting. As a result, children appeared confident and happy. Those who were settling received support at a pace that reflected their individual needs. One parent told us, "All of the staff are welcoming and understanding with my child. They make an effort to always ask about their needs." Another commented, "The staff are amazing, always got time to chat and will help any way they can." Children had developed close attachments with staff and peers, which positively influenced their emotional wellbeing and sense of security.

Staff knew the children well and had developed personal plans that reflected their individual needs. These plans contained the necessary information to support children's health and wellbeing. One parent told us, "I have been involved in my child's plan from the moment they started at the nursery. All my views are taken into account." Another commented, "Staff communicate the personal plan for my child clearly and effectively. Working with us to decide what to focus on during each term." This collaborative approach helped ensure consistency and continuity in children's care.

The nursery team worked very well with other professionals to meet the individual needs of children who required additional support. Visiting professionals gave positive feedback about strong communication and joint working with the nursery and families. A staged intervention approach helped identify and plan for children's needs. This included tailored support strategies, individual plans, communication passports to support transitions, and Team Around the Child (TAC) meetings. As a result, children received timely and appropriate support, which helped improve their communication and social development in a nurturing and inclusive environment.

Personal care routines, such as toileting and hand washing, supported children to develop essential life skills for independence. Nappy changing was carried out sensitively, safeguarding children's privacy and dignity. This contributed to their emotional security and helped foster positive relationships with staff.

Children enjoyed nutritious meals and snacks that met their allergies, preferences, and dietary needs. Staff sat with children during mealtimes, enhancing supervision and supporting meaningful interactions. This fostered quality engagement and a sense of belonging. Children had regular opportunities to practise and develop their independence skills. For example, they took turns pouring drinks and responsibly cleared their dishes and food waste into recycling basins. This encouraged self-sufficiency and a sense of responsibility.

Systems were in place to support the safe management of medication and meet children's health needs. Staff gathered relevant information, enabling them to understand each child's medical requirements and respond appropriately. Staff were reminded to ensure that consent and administration forms were consistently signed by both themselves and the child's parent, and that medication was promptly returned to families when no longer required or when the child no longer attended the service. As a result, children's health needs were met safely and effectively, and families were reassured by the service's commitment to continuous improvement and safe care practices.

Staff demonstrated a clear understanding of their responsibilities in identifying, recording, and reporting safeguarding concerns. All staff had completed relevant child protection training and worked in partnership with external agencies when required. Chronologies were used to record significant events in children's lives that could impact their health and wellbeing. This supported children and their families to receive the help they needed at the right time.

Quality indicator 1.3: Play and learning

At the start of the new term, staff prioritised helping new children settle into the environment, recognising the importance of secure relationships and emotional wellbeing during transitions. This helped children feel safe, settled, and ready to participate in play and learning.

Playroom layouts were thoughtfully arranged to enable children to move around freely. This supported their right to play and have fun. Children used all areas of the environment, indoors and outdoors, which helped them follow their interests and make choices about their play. As a result, children were confident and engaged in meaningful experiences.

Children experienced rich outdoor learning that encouraged exploration, creativity, and problem-solving. One parent told us, "The outdoor set up is amazing for children." Another commented, "My child loves the outdoors and this is a highlight of their learning experiences. The nursery have different learning environments within an outdoor setting that include structured and exploratory play teaching children about the world around them." Children splashed in muddy puddles and investigated how water moved using drainpipes and jugs. They experimented with bats and balls, balanced on the seesaw, searched for berries and worms, and cleaned windows using basins of water and squeegees. These experiences supported their curiosity, teamwork, and thinking skills. As a result, children were motivated, engaged, and learning through play.

Indoors, children explored a range of sensory materials including sand, playdough, and paint. They used their imagination in the home corner, caring for dolls and dressing up, which supported their social and emotional development. Activities such as puzzles, story time, and drawing at the writing table helped promote early literacy and numeracy. These experiences encouraged children to be confident, creative, and to build important early learning skills in a nurturing and stimulating environment.

Planning for learning reflected a balanced approach, combining responsive and intentional strategies. Through free play and small group activities, children learned to recognise their names, explore early maths through counting, number recognition, and by quickly seeing how many items were in a set without needing to count. They also developed an understanding of being part of a group. Staff interactions were warm, respectful, and purposeful. They confidently used open-ended questions to extend children's thinking. As a result, children were more deeply engaged, and their learning and development were well supported.

Staff used a range of tools, including learning journals, floorbooks, and tracking systems, to record and assess children's play, learning, and development. Information about children's progress was shared with families, helping to build strong partnerships and keep them involved in their child's learning journey. Children's voices and interests were clearly reflected in planning, which led to meaningful and responsive experiences that supported their progress.

Some minor improvements were needed in how observations were recorded to ensure a consistent and high-quality approach. The service had identified this and planned support to strengthen the quality and consistency of recording children's learning. This did not detract from the overall quality of practice. As a result, children continued to experience high-quality care and learning that supported their progress and development.

How good is our setting? 5 - Very Good

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

Quality indicator 2.2: Children experience high quality facilities

Children attended a welcoming, spacious, and well-ventilated environment. The playrooms featured high-quality furniture, clearly defined play areas, and a bright atmosphere that supported children's learning. This meant children were comfortable and able to engage in a range of stimulating experiences.

Displays in the entrance area helped families feel informed and involved. Each child had a personal space for their belongings, which supported their sense of security, emotional wellbeing, and inclusion. This helped children feel valued and supported family involvement in their child's experience at nursery.

The nursery was clean and well maintained. Staff and children practised good hand hygiene, which helped prevent the spread of infection and kept children healthy. This contributed to a safe and hygienic environment where children's health was protected.

Children's safety was well supported through clear procedures and a secure environment. Staff completed accident and incident forms, administered first aid when needed, and shared information with families. Regular audits helped identify patterns and guided actions to prevent recurrence. Risk assessments were carried out for individual children and the wider environment, helping staff reduce potential hazards. Boundary fencing, secure gates, and an entry system enabled children to explore safely and with confidence. Staff used a register and whiteboard to monitor attendance throughout the day, which ensured they could account for children's whereabouts and respond quickly when needed. These measures promoted a safe, responsive setting that supported children's wellbeing.

Playrooms were equipped with age-appropriate resources and natural materials that supported children's play, learning, and creativity. Real-life items and environmental print, such as magazines, factual books, and menus, promoted literacy and life skills. Staff were continuing with their plans to further develop the play zones and the newly established outdoor classroom. This was expected to enhance learning opportunities and provide children with a more varied and engaging environment. Overall, children experienced a safe, stimulating, and inclusive setting that supported their progress, wellbeing, and engagement in meaningful play.

How good is our leadership? 5 - Very Good

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

Quality indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well

Children were cared for in a service with clearly defined aims that promoted a respectful, calm, and inclusive atmosphere. Staff prioritised listening to and consulting with children during free play, group time, floorbook activities, and one-to-one support strategies. This helped children feel safe, valued, and able to enjoy their time at the service. The approach supported children's emotional wellbeing and contributed to the development of positive, trusting relationships.

Information was shared with parents through corridor notice boards, which helped keep families informed and involved in their child's experiences. In addition, parents' views and suggestions were gathered throughout the year, informally through conversations and more formally using surveys. One parent told us, "Our opinion seems to matter which is always nice." Another commented, "I'm always happy to provide feedback when requested." This supported effective communication and strengthened partnership working between staff and families.

Relevant policies were in place, but required review to ensure they reflected current guidance and best practice. Plans were in place to carry out this review with staff and relevant professionals, promoting shared ownership and a consistent understanding of expectations. This was expected to further strengthen the service's ability to meet its responsibilities and support positive outcomes for children.

Effective quality assurance practices supported positive experiences and outcomes for children. Senior leaders had implemented self-evaluation processes with input from staff, including regular audits of practice. One staff member told us, "Staff are encouraged to share ideas for improvement." Another said, "We regularly review our practice as a team and discuss what's working and what's not before making decisions." These approaches led to clear improvements in areas such as lunchtime routines, enabling environments, and opportunities for parental involvement.

Planned improvements were relevant and manageable, with progress also evident in areas such as literacy and numeracy attainment and supported transitions for children. Staff demonstrated a strong understanding of the needs of children and families, ensuring that positive outcomes remained central to all improvement planning.

Senior leaders were open to feedback, actively engaged in the inspection process, and demonstrated a clear commitment to continuous improvement. This reflected the service's capacity for growth and its focus on achieving the best possible outcomes for children.

How good is our staff team? 5 - Very Good

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

Quality indicator 4.3: Staff deployment

Children were cared for by a team of staff who worked well together and demonstrated flexibility and resilience during recent changes to service delivery in North Ayrshire. As a result, children experienced continuity in care and benefited from a stable, nurturing environment that supported their wellbeing and development.

Parents and carers felt welcomed at drop-off and collection times and when discussing their child's play, care, and development. One parent told us, "I always feel very welcome whenever I come into the nursery. All the staff are lovely and take the time to chat." Another commented, "Staff are very welcoming and have been happy to chat when I have dropped into the service." As a result, positive relationships were fostered between staff and families, contributing to a supportive and inclusive environment for children.

Staff had a wide range of skills and experience. They were enthusiastic, confident, and happy in their roles. They felt supported by each other and by senior staff, which helped create a positive team atmosphere and improved children's experiences.

Staff absences were managed well to avoid disruption, and new trainees were given a clear induction to help them understand their roles and responsibilities. This helped ensure children received consistent care from a well-prepared team.

Distributed leadership was encouraged, with staff leading activities such as Bookbug and family engagement programmes, including Triple P and Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP). These programmes supported parents to promote their child's learning through everyday activities and helped families develop positive behaviour strategies and manage challenges effectively. They also strengthened staff confidence and skills, enriched children's experiences, and built on families' existing knowledge. As a result, families felt welcomed, informed, and involved in their child's care, and children benefited from stronger home-nursery partnerships.

Staff were attuned to children's needs and interacted with them warmly throughout the day. As a result, children experienced meaningful one-to-one and small group activities that supported their learning and wellbeing.

Regular team meetings gave staff time to talk about their roles, share ideas, and reflect on their work. This helped improve the quality of care and kept team morale high.

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

How good is our care, play and learning?	5 - Very Good
1.1 Nurturing care and support	5 - Very Good
1.3 Play and learning	5 - Very Good

How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	5 - Very Good

How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	5 - Very Good

How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good
4.3 Staff deployment	5 - Very Good

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