Ankerville Nursery - Alness Ltd
Day Care of Children

6 Riverside Drive
Alness
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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
19 August 2026

Service provided by:
Ankerville Nursery (Alness) Ltd.

Service provider number:
SP2011011519

Service no:
CS2006121484

About the service

Ankerville Nursery, Alness is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 169 children from birth to attending primary school. The service is provided by Ankerville Nursery (Alness) Ltd. The centre provides children's day care provision and is open Monday to Friday. The service operates throughout the year.

The nursery is a standalone building on the outskirts of Alness and is organised across a variety of rooms to meet the needs of babies, toddlers, preschool and school aged children. Most children had direct access to a well-resourced outdoor play area, providing regular opportunities for outdoor play and learning. Babies also had access to a separate garden area with appropriate adult support, enabling them to safely enjoy outdoor experiences.

The service works in partnership with The Highland Council to provide funded early learning and childcare.

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.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 17 and 18 August 2026. The inspection was carried out by three inspectors from the Care Inspectorate. Feedback was provided virtually to the leadership team and provider on 19 August 2026.

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.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with children using the service
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents
- reviewed online feedback from 18 families.

Key messages

• Children experienced warm, nurturing relationships that promoted their wellbeing, emotional security and sense of belonging.

• Children benefitted from a range of stimulating play and learning experiences, particularly through sensory play and outdoor learning.

• Real-life learning experiences and strong links with the local community enriched children's learning and development.

• The service demonstrated a commitment to children's rights by providing opportunities for children to influence decisions that affected them.

• Leaders should ensure that actions identified through quality assurance processes are progressed, monitored and evaluated effectively.

• Personal planning did not consistently support continuity and consistency of 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

Leadership	4 - Good
Children play and learn	4 - Good
Children are supported to achieve	4 - 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 staff and resources

The vision, values and aims for the service were clearly understood by staff and reflected in everyday practice. The values of kindness and joy were evident in the nurturing relationships between staff and children. This contributed to a positive ethos where children's wellbeing and development was prioritised.

Staff told us they felt well supported and had a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Leadership was promoted at all levels, with staff encouraged to lead areas of practice and contribute to improvement activity. This encouraged collaborative working and a shared responsibility for improving outcomes for children.

The service demonstrated a commitment to involving children, families and staff in service development. Feedback was actively sought and informed improvement priorities. All parents agreed or strongly agreed that they were involved in a meaningful way in developing the service. One parent commented, "staff always encourage parents, carers and family members to give feedback". This supported a positive culture of participation and continuous improvement.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were informed by the experiences of babies and younger children. However, the experiences of school-aged children were not routinely considered within these processes. Further developing these approaches would help ensure improvement priorities are informed by the experiences and needs of all children attending the service.

Overall, leaders had a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development for babies and younger children. They had identified appropriate priorities to improve outcomes for children. 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. This helped identify areas for development and was beginning to have positive changes in practice. However, improvements were not yet consistently embedded in practice.

There was scope to further develop quality assurance arrangements to better evaluate the impact of improvement activity and ensure identified actions were progressed in a timely manner. For example, we identified concerns relating to the safe administration of medication that had previously been recognised by the service but had not yet been fully addressed. We discussed the benefits of recording clear actions, timescales and responsible individuals within floor book planning to support accountability, monitor progress and strengthen oversight of improvement activity.

Arrangements were in place to support staff development and reflective practice. Individual support and reflection meetings provided opportunities for staff to reflect on their practice and discuss their development needs. However, formal observations of practice were not routinely incorporated into these arrangements. We discussed the benefits of incorporating more structured observations of practice within support and supervision arrangements.

Children were meaningfully involved in recruitment processes. This demonstrated a strong commitment to children's rights and ensuring their voices influenced decisions that affected them. Robust, safe recruitment practices were followed to help ensure that staff appointed to the service were suitable to work with children. New staff benefitted from effective induction and mentoring arrangements, supporting consistency of practice and positive 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 benefitted from a varied range of play and learning experiences that supported their curiosity, creativity and overall development. Sensory play was a particular strength across the setting, promoting active exploration and engagement. The outdoor environment offered rich opportunities for investigation, physical activity and learning through play. Children were observed confidently exploring the mud kitchen, using natural materials to experiment, solve problems and develop their own ideas. Babies were supported well to engage in sensory experiences matched to their stage of development, helping to build confidence and encourage early learning. Parents valued these experiences, with one commenting, "My [child] loves playing in the water" and another describing how their child regularly came home, "covered in mud and dirt" which they viewed as, "signs of a good day at nursery."

Staff contributed positively to children's learning through warm, responsive interactions. Singing, storytelling and meaningful conversations helped create an engaging and stimulating environment. Where staff effectively extended children's thinking and interests, children demonstrated increased confidence, language development, problem-solving skills and sustained involvement. Leaders had identified interactions as a key area for ongoing development and were taking steps to further strengthen and embed this practice across the service.

The learning environment supported children's development of early literacy, numeracy and creativity. However, opportunities to promote literacy and numeracy were not consistently embedded across all areas of the setting. As a result, children did not always have opportunities to apply and extend these skills through their play. Further consideration should be given to how these learning experiences are embedded more effectively throughout children's daily experiences.

Real-life learning experiences helped children make meaningful connections between their learning and the wider world. Children's involvement in growing vegetables and using these in food preparation supported their understanding of healthy eating and where food comes from. Strong links with the local community further enriched learning, with regular walks and visits promoting children's confidence, wellbeing and sense of belonging.

The majority of children were largely engaged and motivated in their play. Some older children would have benefitted from more stimulating and appropriately challenging experiences that reflected their age, stage and interests. At times, this limited opportunities for them to fully sustain higher levels of engagement. Opportunities for creativity could also be enhanced through the presentation of more inviting and open-ended resources that encourage imagination, experimentation and exploration.

Daily routines did not always support children to sustain their play and learning. Opportunities for free-flow play between the indoor and outdoor environments were not consistently maximised, with some children spending time waiting or lining up to access outdoor experiences. In addition, group tidy-up routines interrupted ongoing play in the toddler and pre-school rooms. This limited children's opportunities to make independent choices and follow their interests for extended periods of time.

The setting had appropriately identified observation, assessment and the tracking of children's progress as priorities for improvement. Planned developments, including the introduction of tracking meetings, had the potential to strengthen staff's understanding of children's progress and support needs. As these approaches were still being implemented, it was too early to evaluate their impact on outcomes for children.

Children are supported to achieve — 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: Nurturing care and support

Feedback from families was positive, with parents describing staff as, "amazing" and highlighting the caring and dedicated support provided. Families shared that their children were happy, settled and developing well, with one parent noting that their child had gained new skills and confidence since attending the nursery. We observed warm, nurturing relationships between staff and children. Staff were caring, responsive and attentive to children's individual needs, helping children to feel safe, secure and confident within the setting. For the majority of time staff provided appropriate comfort, reassurance and emotional support. However, there were a few occasions where opportunities to respond more promptly to children's cues for support, engagement or interaction were missed.

Staff demonstrated a good understanding of children's daily care routines and responded appropriately to immediate needs such as, feeding, toileting and rest. Staff generally knew children well and were able to describe their individual needs and preferences. However, the quality of personal planning was inconsistent. This had the potential to impact on continuity and consistency of care. Clear support strategies were not in place for a number of children, and information relating to children's care and support needs was held in different locations. As a result, key information was not always easily accessible to staff, which increased the risk of agreed approaches not being followed.

The setting had established positive partnerships with families and created opportunities for them to be involved in children's experiences. For example, families were invited to attend health and wellbeing workshops, afternoon teas and stay-and-play sessions. These opportunities strengthened connections between home and the setting. The service could build on these positive relationships by further developing day-to-day communication with families. Information was routinely shared through doorstep conversations. We discussed how making greater use of these daily interactions could support collaboration and information sharing, further enhancing families' involvement in their child's care, wellbeing and development.

Partnership working with other professionals supported children to receive responsive and individualised support. Collaboration with Physiotherapy and Speech and Language Therapy services increased staff knowledge and confidence. This strengthened support for children's communication, development and wellbeing.

Snack and mealtime experiences were generally positive, providing children with opportunities to socialise and develop communication skills. Staff followed safe mealtime practices and demonstrated an awareness of choking prevention. Children were supported to develop independence during these routines. For example, babies were encouraged to develop self-help skills, and older children were able to pour their own drinks. However, opportunities to further promote independence were not always maximised. There was also scope to review the transition to lunchtime for older children to better support the flow of their daily experiences.

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	4 - Good
Nurturing care and support	4 - Good

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