

Links Nursery Balmedie Day Care of Children

Unit 4
Birch Way
Balmedie
Aberdeen
AB23 8SJ

Telephone: 01358 743 094

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
20 August 2026

Service provided by:
Links Nurseries Ltd

Service provider number:
SP2007009491

Service no:
CS2007167228

About the service

Links Nursery Balmedie is a daycare of children service. It is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 93 children not yet attending primary school at any one time. No more than 17 are aged under 2 years based in the Starfish room; no more than 18 children aged 18 months to 2 years 9 months based in the Turtle room; no more than 25 aged from 2 years 6 months to not yet attending primary school full time based in the Tigersharks room and no more than 33 children aged 3 years to not yet attending primary school full time based in the Puffin room.

The service is located in the coastal town of Balmedie, close to local amenities such as shops and parks. Care is provided across four rooms situated on two floors. Children have access to three secure outdoor areas. The service operates 07:30 to 18:00, Monday to Friday.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 19 August 2026 between 08:40 and 18:30 and 20 August 2026 between 08:30 and 17:10. This inspection was carried out by three 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.

To inform our evaluation we:

- spent time with children using the service and spoke to five of their parents/carers
- received nine completed questionnaires from staff
- received 13 completed questionnaires from parents/carers
- spoke with staff and the management team
- 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 caring, nurturing relationships that supported their wellbeing, confidence and sense of security.
- Children benefitted from responsive care and opportunities to develop independence.
- Children experienced engaging play and learning opportunities which supported their confidence, wellbeing and sense of belonging.
- Recent improvements to the process of planning and assessing children's learning had enhanced children's experiences. Work should continue to fully implement the identification and planning for next steps to support children's progress.
- Leadership promoted a positive culture of improvement, with staff, families and children having opportunities to be involved in service development.
- Quality assurance and self-evaluation supported improvement, although children's participation and monitoring processes could be strengthened.

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

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 service's vision, values and aims (VVA) were visible throughout the setting and reflected its commitment to supporting positive outcomes for children and families. Children, parents and staff had been involved in reviewing the VVA, demonstrating a commitment to consultation and shared ownership. Further engagement with families and other stakeholders was planned to ensure the VVA continued to reflect the aspirations of children and families and informed service development.

The service's values were evident in daily practice. For example, parents and carers were welcomed into playrooms, supporting trusting relationships and effective information sharing. The service continued to develop its approach to children's rights, working to strengthen understanding and awareness amongst children, families and staff.

Most parents who provided feedback felt meaningfully involved in the development of the service. They described having regular opportunities to share views through parent meetings, consultations, surveys and ongoing discussions with staff and managers. Parents gave examples of suggestions being listened to and acted upon. Systems were in place to gather children's views. There was scope to further strengthen how children's feedback informed self-evaluation and improvement planning. Developing this approach would help ensure children have a consistent influence on decisions affecting their experiences.

Quality assurance processes were in place and had been reviewed since the previous inspection. Responsibility for some monitoring activities had been delegated across the leadership team, helping to improve sustainability and promote shared ownership of improvement. Staff viewed these changes positively. Audits and observations generally identified strengths and areas for development and supported ongoing improvement. However, some monitoring processes required further strengthening. For example, greater scrutiny of chronologies and follow-up actions would help ensure records were accurate, complete and effectively support children's wellbeing.

The service engaged in self-evaluation using national guidance and quality improvement frameworks. Staff were actively involved in evaluating practice and implementing change. They reported feeling included and valued throughout improvement processes. Following feedback from the previous inspection, the service had reviewed aspects of the environment and play experiences. Improvements made had enhanced children's engagement and access to learning opportunities.

An improvement plan was in place, with a clear focus on further developing learning environments and approaches to planning and assessment. Timescales for completion and review supported a manageable pace of change. There was scope to strengthen evaluative comments within improvement planning by providing more detail about outstanding actions and focusing more consistently on the impact of changes for children.

Recruitment procedures helped promote children's safety and wellbeing. Appropriate pre-employment checks were completed before staff commenced work. Management recognised the value of maintaining a

stable staff team and considered team dynamics, values and skills as part of recruitment processes. Children had been involved in recruitment activities through meeting candidates. On an organisation wide initiative children were being asked to suggest interview questions and these were being incorporated into the interview process. This supported participation and demonstrated that children's views were valued.

A structured induction programme supported new staff to develop confidence and competence in their roles. Induction processes were tailored to individual responsibilities, helping staff acquire the knowledge and skills required to meet children's needs effectively.

Relationships across the staff team were positive and respectful, contributing to a welcoming ethos for children and families. Staff reported feeling well supported by managers and colleagues and highlighted teamwork as a strength of the service. Restructured management oversight for different age groups supported working towards improvements and support for staff. Senior staff and managers provided mentoring and support, promoting professional learning and development. Opportunities for sharing skills and effective practice were available, although these were not yet fully embedded. Plans to reintroduce regular team meetings should further strengthen communication, collaboration and consistency of practice.

Children play and learn 4 - Good

Quality Indicator: Playing, learning and developing

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.

Children were happy and settled within the setting. They actively engaged in a range of play and learning experiences, including sensory, construction, role play and physical activities. Children confidently approached staff for support and invited them to participate in their play, demonstrating positive relationships and a strong sense of security.

Staff demonstrated an understanding of children's developmental needs through their interactions and the resources provided. They consistently engaged at children's level, showing genuine interest in their ideas and experiences. Improvements in staff understanding of how children use available spaces and resources had enhanced children's opportunities for meaningful engagement.

Children benefitted from regular access to outdoor environments. Improvements to routines supporting movement to these areas had reduced waiting times and interruptions to play, enabling children to sustain their engagement. Children accessed a range of community experiences, including visits to the local sensory garden, beach, library and shops. These opportunities supported their confidence, extended their learning and strengthened their sense of belonging within the wider community.

Staff had improved the planning of experiences based on children's interests. Individual staff responsibilities within playrooms supported a more focused approach to creating engaging learning environments. Consideration had been given to room layouts and accessibility of resources, helping children make choices and follow their interests independently. Children were involved in activities such as making playdough and building dens, with staff supporting and developing their ideas. This contributed to children feeling valued and respected.

Children benefitted from both planned and spontaneous learning opportunities. Improvements had increased opportunities for imaginative play through the introduction of more authentic resources. Staff

responded positively to children's interests, adapting experiences to reflect their ideas. For example, role play areas were transformed into familiar community settings, which then supported literacy development through recognising signs and logos. Some staff effectively adapted experiences in response to children's emerging interests, extending learning through activities such as pirate play and sensory experiences. Further development of these skills should continue to promote a consistent approach across the staff team.

Children enjoyed stories, songs and discussions that supported the development of language and literacy skills. Numeracy was promoted naturally through activities such as measuring ingredients, counting and comparing quantities. Staff interactions generally supported children's learning and engagement. However, opportunities remained to enhance some learning resources. For example, books were not always presented attractively or selected to reflect current interests.

Children were beginning to use technology to extend their experiences. Examples included using tablets to research interests and technology-based resources to promote safety awareness. While these experiences enhanced learning, opportunities to use technology purposefully were sometimes missed. For example, an opportunity for children to take and then discuss a photo. Further development in this area would help maximise children's engagement and curiosity.

Staff supported children to express preferences and make choices throughout the day. Training on skilled interactions had increased staff confidence in promoting children's thinking and problem-solving skills. We saw examples of where this had a positive effect for children. Such as staff asking children what was needed next. However, opportunities to extend children's thinking were not always recognised. Continued support and development is planned and this should help strengthen consistency of practice.

Children were able to lead their own play and learning. Improvements to daily routines and transitions reduced disruption and better supported children's choices. Most staff demonstrated an understanding of child-led play, although occasional interactions did not fully support children's ownership of their play. Management recognised the need to continue monitoring and developing practice in this area.

Processes for planning and assessing children's learning had improved. Staff had greater clarity regarding their roles, and this was contributing to improved engagement. Observations were shared with parents through an online platform, supporting partnership working and recognising learning across home and nursery environments. While some staff used observations effectively to identify next steps in learning, this was not yet consistent and further development was required to strengthen practice across the service.

Children are supported to achieve 4 - Good

Quality Indicator: Nurturing care and support

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.

Staff valued their relationships with children and families and understood the importance of trusting, nurturing interactions in supporting children's wellbeing. Parents consistently described staff as caring, approachable and responsive. Feedback highlighted the positive relationships developed with families, the continuity provided during staff changes, and management's strong knowledge of individual children and parents.

Children were supported to develop independence in a safe and nurturing environment. Support was through gentle interactions, including reminders to take turns or consider consequences of an action such as pulling on the den. Babies' growing independence was supported through taking time for them to feed themselves or offering a hand to hold when balancing or walking. Staff responded sensitively to children's verbal and non-verbal communication, recognising cues and offering encouragement when children experienced difficulties completing tasks independently.

Children's safety was promoted through risk assessments and actions taken to minimise hazards. There were opportunities for children to contribute to managing risk, including involvement in garden safety checks. This helped children develop an understanding of keeping themselves and others safe. As opportunities for children's participation in risk assessment were not consistent across all rooms, the manager agreed to further develop this area.

Children's wellbeing was supported through effective transition arrangements. These included settling-in visits, discussions with parents regarding routines and comforters, and flexibility to meet individual needs. Staff recognised the importance of consistency and worked collaboratively with families to ensure children received appropriate care and support. Effective information sharing at arrival and collection times helped staff respond to children's changing needs throughout the day.

Staff demonstrated a strong team approach and prioritised children's experiences. They supported one another by sharing tasks and resources, enabling colleagues to remain focused on interactions with children.

Children enjoyed relaxed and sociable mealtimes. Staff sat alongside children, promoting conversation and supporting communication skills while remaining attentive to individual needs. Children's health and wellbeing were supported through nutritious meals planned in line with recognised nutritional guidance. Parents expressed satisfaction with the quality of food provided.

Children with dietary requirements were well supported and clear systems helped ensure suitable alternatives were provided when required. Most children were encouraged to develop self-help skills through serving food and pouring drinks independently. However, opportunities to promote independence during mealtimes were not consistent for all children. The manager agreed to improve practice across the service. Children's choices and preferences were respected, with alternatives available where appropriate.

Personal plans were in place for all children and contained information about health needs, routines, interests and preferences. A recently introduced format had improved the quality and relevance of information recorded. Plans were reviewed regularly with parents, helping to ensure information remained accurate. Staff used this information effectively to support children's care. However, some plans would benefit from more detailed recording of agreed support strategies, for example approaches to toileting, to promote consistency across the staff team.

Records of significant events helped staff identify children and families who may require additional support. Recording practices could be strengthened by ensuring entries were accurately dated and follow-up actions clearly documented. The manager agreed to access local authority training to support improvement in this area.

Positive relationships with families encouraged meaningful participation. Parents valued opportunities to engage with staff, contribute ideas and access playrooms with their children. Most parents were satisfied with communication and felt comfortable approaching staff or management with questions or concerns. One parent felt that updates through the electronic application could be more regular. The manager agreed

to review this to further improve communication with families.

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

The manager and provider should work to embed systems, across the full staff team, for planning and assessment which consistently promote children's progression.

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

'I am supported to achieve my potential in education and employment if this is right for me' (HSCS 1.27).

This area for improvement was made on 1 April 2026.

Action taken since then

Progress had been made in embedding a system for planning and assessing learning. Staff attended further training to support them in developing these skills. This had already had an impact with staff more confident in recognising children's learning and identifying next steps. However, work needs to continue with this, particularly around next steps ensuring that these are achievable, include strategies to support achievement and are followed up. This has been identified through quality assurance and included in current improvement plan.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

The manager and provider should ensure that children have access to an environment and resources which maximise opportunities for them to be challenged, creative and engaged in their play.

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

'As a child I have fun as I develop my skills in understanding, thinking, investigation and problem solving including through imaginative play and storytelling' (HSCS 1.30).

This area for improvement was made on 1 April 2026.

Action taken since then

New resources had been introduced, and the use of spaces evaluated in individual rooms, resulting in improvements with further improvements planned. Staff had improved their skills in providing provocations for play and extending children's engagement and interests through interactions.

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	4 - Good
Nurturing care and support	4 - Good

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