Headstart Nursery School at Leith
Day Care of Children

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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
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Service provided by:
Headstart Nursery Schools Ltd

Service provider number:
SP2008009639

Service no:
CS2007167787

About the service

Headstart Nursery School provides a day care of children service from premises situated in Leith, Edinburgh, close to local primary schools, transport links, parks, shops and other amenities. The setting provides early learning and childcare to a maximum of 70 children aged between three months and entry into primary school, of whom no more than 30 children can be under two years of age and of whom no more than 40 children will be between the age of two and five years. There are currently 113 children registered with and 80 currently attending the service.

The setting consists of three main playrooms catering for babies, children aged two to three years and preschool children, each with their own toilets and changing facilities. A separate room is used for lunches and snacks for older children. An enclosed garden area was situated at the front of the building for preschool children. Further outdoor space was at the side of the building for children aged two to three years. A small outdoor space had been developed to the rear of the building for babies to use.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Wednesday 3 June 2026 between 09:45 and 17:10 and Thursday 4 June 2026 between 09:20 and 15:00. 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 information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with 15 children using the service and gathered feedback from thirteen of their families
- spoke with staff and management and visiting professionals
- assessed core assurances, including the physical environment
- observed practice and daily life
- 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, improvements were identified relating to core assurances. We have reported where improvement is necessary under the relevant quality indicators.

Key messages

- Children had fun playing with their friends inside and out in the service gardens.
- Opportunities were varied and supported children to learn new skills.
- Children had positive relationships with staff who supported them to enjoy a variety of play and learning experiences.
- Self-evaluation and quality assurance systems had been further developed to support staff to identify improvements and develop the service.
- A new fence around garden spaces helped to keep children safe.

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

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 Vision, values and aims for the service were displayed and shared with staff and families in their introduction packs. This helped them to know what to expect from the service. The service had developed these in consultation with staff and families. They reflected children's rights and current best practice guidance documents. Children experienced warmth, respect and dignity in their interactions with staff in line with the services aims and values. Staff felt well supported by the manager, they felt listened to and their views were used to develop the service. Staff told us that the supportive learning culture was helping them to develop their skills and knowledge to improve care and experiences for children. Parents felt involved in developing the service and were overall happy with the quality of their children's experiences. The manager shared that they plan to consult with families and staff and families again when review the service's vision, values and aims to ensure that these always reflect current views and needs.

Quality assurance processes had been further developed to support improvement in key areas of the service. A quality assurance calendar supported the team to target specific areas of practice across the year. For example, mealtimes, garden areas, play, personal plans, had been a focus which supported the service to address the areas for improvement made at previous inspections. Audits were supporting the service to ensure consistent recording practice. For example, medication and personal plan audits supported families to be involved in regular reviews, meaning that information was current, which helped to keep children safe. The manager shared that audits had highlighted areas for further development. For example, the consistency of observations in children's learning journals. This reflected the findings of our reviews of children's information. To further develop quality audits consideration should be given to service risk assessments. For example, ensuring that these support staff to develop strategies to minimise risk on outings.

Improvement plans were in place and had identified key tasks and recorded dates when improvements had been achieved. More could be done to show how the service would know if they have achieved the outcomes. This would support them to ensure progress and improve children's experiences.

Children and families feedback was gathered and used to develop the service. Information about how feedback had been used was shared with them in floor books and newsletters helping them to feel listened to.

Recruitment files which we sampled showed that practice was following current safer recruitment practice. For example, seeking additional references for previous childcare roles where the most recent employer was not linked to childcare. Induction processes for core staff followed the national induction resources and supported staff to reflect on their skills and practice development. More work is needed to ensure that all staff complete induction packs to ensure consistency in practice and positive outcomes for children.

The service had systems in place to check Scottish Social Services Council registration and Protecting Vulnerable Groups registration for the agency staff they employed. This helped to keep children safe. Induction checklists supported agency staff to know what service polices were. This could be further

developed to consider the skills and experience of the staff supplied by the agency to support the service to deploy staff effectively. For example, consideration should be given to roles and responsibilities of agency staff when working in the service to ensure the quality and safety of children's experiences (see area for improvement 3 under 'What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection').

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 generally engaged in playing and learning throughout their day. Most children were settled and confident in the space helping them to be motivated and curious to explore their environment and access a variety of experiences.

The core provision was available in each play space, this supported children to have access to regular opportunities which were familiar and provided opportunities to have fun. Sensory materials like play dough were well used by children and the playdough 'station' was supporting them to learn new skills as they created their own. Children were motivated to role play in well-developed home corner activities which were linked to current interests. For example, the shop in pre-school was supporting children to develop numeracy skills, the vets and pets theme in toddlers was helping children to develop their knowledge and skills in caring for animals.

Babies current interest in rolling schematic play was supported through the resources available. For example, staff provided buggies and other resources to roll around. This supported babies to explore movement and develop their physical coordination and curiosity.

Planting opportunities in the gardens helped children to learn about caring for nature, children also enjoyed sensory experiences, for example, smelling herbs and using them in their play.

Loose parts play was at an early stage in the service. Staff shared that they planned to further develop this to support children's creativity.

Songs were used to support children's language development and understanding of nursery experiences. For example, handwashing songs, helped children to wash their hands in line with infection control guidelines. Staff picked up on children's interest in books and supported engagement with these building children's early literacy skills. Staff engagement was generally positive, kind and caring with narration of children's experiences supporting their language development. Further development of the quality of staff interactions could help them to further support children's thinking skills.

Some activities were set up linked to current themes, more could be done to ensure that these are supporting creativity rather than expecting a fixed adult led outcome. Consideration could also be given to ensuring that these are available flexibly to allow children opportunities to participate at a time which suits them.

Children had developed friendships and staff were supporting them to be successful in building peer relationships. For example, using distraction to support younger children's conflict over resources.

Children enjoyed being outside, older children had access to a larger space and this supported them to develop new skills like balance and respect for nature. Younger children accessed smaller garden spaces and babies often went on walks in the local area. Consideration should be given to how this is used and added to with use of the local community to give children consistent experiences across the nursery.

Responsive planning was in place which took account of children's current interests and supported them to explore themes. This could be further developed. For example, exploring the babies current schematic play interests alongside the colour theme in babies, would add depth to the play experiences offered.

Pre-school had intentional plans which were starting to link children's individual 'postcards' for learning, stages of development to the experiences offered helping children to develop new skills. Children's voices were captured in the planning, helping them to feel heard.

Observations in children's learning journals were generally detailing activities children had taken part in. Some were more detailed and shared skills children were learning. More work was needed to ensure that these were consistently sharing detail around children's emerging skills and considering their next steps for development. Leaders should share expectations for the content of observations to support staff development of this.

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.

Children experienced interactions which were warm from staff who were kind and caring. Children were generally safe and had their needs met. Interactions were calm reassuring and respectful. Positive body language and gentle tones were consistently used across the service helping children to feel emotionally safe.

Transitions were well planned and records were well documented for children moving to new rooms as they progressed. However, more consideration could be given to flexibility around the daily routines for children who are new and settling into the service to support them to have consistently positive experiences.

The privacy and dignity of children was respected by staff. For example, staff asked children's views and followed requests around nappy and clothing changes. This helped children feel listened to and respected.

Sleep was offered in a designated space for babies in line with their current needs. This helped them to settle well. Having designated spaces for children under three to sleep, helped waking children to continue their play throughout sleep times. Consideration should be given to ways of responding to children's cues and offering sleep opportunities as well as rest for older children when they need it.

Mealtimes were generally fun and well supervised by staff who sat at tables and socialised with children. Children were learning new skills through the opportunities offered. For example, cutting up their own fruit for snack. Children were encouraged to stay hydrated. For example, water bottles were taken outside with them and were readily available throughout the day. To further improve snack times, children with allergies should consistently be offered a suitable alternative to make mealtimes inclusive. Consideration should also

be given to the deployment of staff around mealtimes to ensure that qualified and experienced staff who know the children are always supporting the children in the room, rather than focussing on other tasks, like meal preparation (see area for improvement 3 under 'What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection').

Very few children had medication in the service. Where children had medication, appropriate permissions had been sought to ensure staff knew how to manage this to support children's wellbeing. Where lifesaving medication was required, records shared stepped approaches to care to help staff to keep children safe in the event of an emergency. Parental reviews had taken place regularly which meant that information was kept up to date.

Staff generally responded to children's cues for attention well. More work could be done to ensure that this is consistent across the service for all children. Staff were using 'now and next' lanyards with symbols to support communication effectively and used 'keys for communication' to support some children to develop skills. There was use of basic hand signs at times in the baby room which was helping children to understand routines. This could be further developed to support effective communication for all children.

All children had personal plans in place which were reviewed with families regularly to keep information current and useful. 'Postcards' in the plans highlighted current strategies of support and areas of learning.

Staff were dating when children were achieving aims. More could be done to link these with observations in their learning journals. Staff had linked with other professionals to develop individual support plans for children where there were identified needs. More work is needed to ensure that the planned strategies are consistently followed out for children to support their achievement. Records could be further developed to show strategies of support where needs are identified, before formal assessments take place to provide consistent support.

Parents told us they were all happy overall with the quality of service. Floor books showed that families were consulted regularly and had been invited to events and share in 'stay and play' times in the nursery. The majority of families giving us feedback felt involved in the service. Handover communication was supported with daily sheets to give families clear information about their child's day. Parents valued this communication and told us they had positive relationships with the staff caring for their children. Systems to display pictures of all staff working in the service helped parents to get to know the staff caring for their children.

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

To ensure that all children have positive mealtime experiences and a balanced diet in line with current best practice guidance, the service should consider:

- how long children spend waiting for food to be served

- the balance of nutrition across the day
- choice of healthy snacks
- how food is presented to make it enticing.

The monitoring of serving temperatures, to ensure that these are safe.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state: 'I can choose suitably presented and healthy meals and snacks, including fresh fruit and vegetables, and participate in menu planning' (HSCS 1.33).

This area for improvement was made on 25 September 2025.

Action taken since then

Lunches were provided by families and staff heated them and served them up attractively. Snacks were healthy and children's independence was promoted through self-serving and preparation helping them learn new skills. Infection control and food temperature regulation was well recorded and helping to keep children safe. More could be done to ensure that mealtimes are consistently inclusive and positive experiences for all children.

This area for improvement is met.

Previous area for improvement 2

To ensure children have a consistently safe place to play, the service should review the security of the low fencing around the pre-school garden.

This is to ensure care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'My environment is secure and safe' (HSCS 5.19).

This area for improvement was made on 29 September 2025.

Action taken since then

New high fencing had been installed. This made the garden space safer and more secure. The high fence made the garden more private, and allowed staff to add features making it more pleasant.

This area for improvement is met.

Previous area for improvement 3

To ensure that children have consistently high-quality experiences in the nursery the service should review the effectiveness of staff deployment. This should include, but is not limited to:

- considering how personal care, sleep and mealtimes can be provided more responsively
- attachment is considered as part of deployment decisions and practice.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that as a child: 'I am supported and cared for sensitively by people who anticipate issues and are aware of and plan for any known vulnerability or frailty' (HSCS 3.18) and 'People have time to support and care for me and speak with me' (HSCS 3.16).

This area for improvement was made on 27 September 2024.

Action taken since then

At times the baby room was left with unqualified and agency staff supporting children while qualified staff were on walks or preparing lunch. Consideration should always be given to deployment decisions to avoid new agency staff taking on roles which do not support children's need for attachment to be supported. For example, settling babies to sleep or providing personal care through nappy changing. Qualified staff should be confident to lead agency staff in practice to promote consistent and high quality care.

This area for improvement is not met and is continued in this report.

Previous area for improvement 4

To promote children's overall wellbeing personal planning should be further developed to ensure that all children are supported to achieve their full potential. This should include, but is not limited to:

- ensuring that all individual needs are detailed,
- tracking and sharing any concerns
- tracking and sharing children's progress and if they are reaching milestones,
- accessing support where needed, sharing strategies used to support individuals.

Using all of this information to support children to reach their full potential.

This is to ensure care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: as a child, 'My personal plan (sometimes referred to as my care plan) is right for me because it sets out how my needs will be met, as well as my wishes and choices' (HSCS 1.14) and 'My care and support meets my needs and is right for me' (HSCS 1.19)

This area for improvement was made on 27 September 2024.

Action taken since then

All children had personal plans in place helping staff to meet their needs. Staff used chronology to record any significant information for children. Strategies of support had been developed on 'postcards' and staff tracked and shared this with families to ensure children were supported to progress in the service. Reviews had taken place regularly keeping information current and supporting staff to meet their needs effectively. Staff worked with other professionals to develop strategies of support where children had identified needs, helping to meet their needs.

This area for improvement is met.

Previous area for improvement 5

To ensure that all children to have high quality play opportunities to support them to have fun, learn and develop, the provider should ensure that the quality of experiences are consistent across the nursery. This should include, but is not limited to:

- ensuring that all children have access to high quality outdoor play experiences
- indoor experiences give children a rich variety of experiences throughout their day
- consideration is given to the opportunities provided when access to areas is limited, for example to facilitate quiet sleep spaces
- core provision is routinely provided.

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

state that: as a child, 'I can direct my own play and activities in the way that I choose, and freely access a wide range of experiences and resources suitable to my age and stage, which stimulate my natural curiosity, learning and creativity' (HSCS 2.27)

This area for improvement was made on 27 September 2024.

Action taken since then

All children had access to a variety of play opportunities across the day. Older children accessed the garden in the morning and afternoon, more could be done to offer outdoor play flexibly throughout the day. Toddlers had free access to outdoors, which was well used. The service could continue to develop the garden areas in line with toddlers interests. Babies accessed resources in the community daily helping them to build their knowledge of their local area. The service told us they were continuing to develop the garden area to ensure that children's experiences were consistent. Core provision was used in all rooms and well accessed by children helping them to explore and build new skills. Some activities would benefit from being more child-led to support creativity. Play continued in the main rooms during sleep times helping waking children to enjoy their play unrestricted.

This area for improvement is met.

Previous area for improvement 6

To further develop the quality of the service and enhance outcomes for children, the provider should ensure that quality assurance processes, improvement planning and self-evaluation are further developed and embedded. The processes should consult with and share outcomes with children and their families. They should identify strengths and areas for improvements, with the development of clear improvement plans, measurable outcomes and monitoring to support positive outcomes for children and families.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes' (HSCS 4.19).

This area for improvement was made on 27 September 2024.

Action taken since then

Quality assurance processes had been further developed to support improvement in key areas of the service. The quality assurance calendar had supported the team to focus on key areas. For example, mealtimes, garden areas, play, personal plans, which helped to address areas for improvement from previous inspections. More work is needed to ensure that attachment is always central to deployment decisions and the consideration of risks is embedded into practice for example planning outings.

Audits were supporting the service to have good practice around recording. For example, medication, and personal plans were reviewed with families in line with legislation and best practice guidance documents.

Improvement plans were in place and had identified key tasks, more could be done to show how the service would know if they had achieved the outcomes.

Children and families feedback was gathered and used to develop the service.

This area for improvement is met.

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

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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