St. Mary's Primary Nursery Class
Day Care of Children

Bank Street
Alexandria
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Telephone: 01389 773 740

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
3 June 2026

Service provided by:
West Dunbartonshire Council

Service provider number:
SP2003003383

Service no:
CS2017355236

About the service

St. Mary's Primary Nursery Class is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 40 children. The service is situated within St. Mary's Primary School in the Alexandria area of West Dunbartonshire. At the time of inspection there were a total of 29 children present on the first day and 31 children present on the second day.

Children using the service have access to an entrance area, one large playroom, toilets, kitchen, and a large outdoor play space. It is close to shops, local amenities and public transport routes.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 2 and 3 June 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 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 and their families
- gathered feedback from nine families through online questionnaires
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents
- assessed core assurances, including the physical environment.

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, responsive care that effectively supported their emotional wellbeing and development.
- Children were well supported to play and learn at their own pace, enabling them to explore with confidence and enjoyment.
- Children enjoyed free-flow access to outdoor play experiences which supported their choices and engagement in play.
- Effective opportunities for family engagement strengthened partnerships and supported children's learning and wellbeing.
- The provider needed to improve the lunchtime experience to ensure it was safe, calm and nurturing, and supported children's independence and learning.

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.

Leaders demonstrated a positive and proactive approach throughout the inspection. Managers and staff engaged openly with discussion, reflecting on practice and identifying areas for improvement. Leaders had already recognised many of the key areas for development, demonstrating a clear commitment to improvement and capacity to drive change.

The service worked with children and families to develop clear vision, values and aims. These were visible within the environment, promoting a shared sense of purpose. The vision of children learning, growing, playing and having fun, alongside the shared values, supported a strong focus on keeping children at the heart of the service. Leaders continued to strengthen links between the vision, values and daily practice by using characters, such as Holly Happiness and Eddie Excellence. As a result, children experienced a consistent and shared approach, which supported their wellbeing, confidence and understanding of positive values.

The service had a clear improvement plan which was specific and targeted, and reflected current priorities and the needs of the setting. Staff were working on key areas. These included the development of high-quality provocations, improvements to the lunchtime experience, and the reintroduction of Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHs) programme. These processes were not yet fully established and needed time to show how they improved outcomes for children.

Leaders had begun to develop more robust quality assurance processes. This included a focus on self-evaluation. A quality assurance calendar was in place, with clear roles and responsibilities, and staff were beginning to contribute through champion roles. However, leaders needed more time to fully embed this approach and ensure it was shared and inclusive. This meant, children were beginning to benefit from more consistent approaches to improvement.

The team had experienced a number of staff absences over recent months and monitoring processes were not sufficiently robust or consistent. Leaders did not always provide specific and constructive feedback on observed practice to reinforce good practice and support improvement. Strengthening these approaches would support more consistent practice and improved outcomes for children.

Leadership responsibilities were distributed across staff, with identified leads for key areas including literacy, numeracy, family learning, outdoor learning and community engagement. Early signs of progress were evident; for example, cookery classes with parents were well attended, and number hunt activities encouraged children to explore numbers in their home environment. However leaders had not yet measured the impact of this work, which limited their ability to clearly demonstrate outcomes for children.

Overall, the staff team demonstrated a committed and positive approach despite recent instability in staffing. Children were safely supervised and appropriate ratios were maintained. However, the current deployment model limited staff's ability to engage consistently with children. This included offering sustained interactions and extending learning through wonder and challenge. This was observed when staff were responsive to supervision and care tasks, which interrupted opportunities to ask open-ended questions or support deeper thinking. We discussed reviewing the daily routine and staff deployment. Leaders were not always available, to effectively support or model best practice. Leaders needed to strengthen these approaches to ensure children experienced more consistent, high-quality interactions that promote deeper thinking, and sustained engagement in their learning.

Children play and learn 4 - Good

Quality Indicator: Play, learning and development

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 a welcoming and well-organised environment both indoors and outdoors. Staff set up areas in advance and offered meaningful opportunities for children to lead and extend their play by adding to and adapting experiences. Children moved freely between the large playroom and outdoor area, promoting choice and access to outdoor play and learning. Parents agreed and told us "My child is involved in loads of different opportunities and experiences in St Mary's ELCC. They go out walks, play outside, learning, read books, play with their friends, sing songs and have loads of fun" and "This nursery is fantastic and the children can play outside which my child absolutely loves."

Children were actively engaged in play throughout the session. They appeared happy, relaxed, and enjoyed positive interactions with their peers. For example, children used paint in spray bottles to make marks and negotiated turn-taking using a timer. Others threw an action figure into a tree to observe how quickly it fell, exploring cause and effect, accompanied by laughter as it landed. These experiences supported children's social skills, independence and early critical thinking.

Staff provided warm, responsive interactions which often supported children's engagement and learning. For example, during water play, staff used effective language to introduce early mathematical concepts such as "empty" and "full" and extended learning through discussion about colour. Children were fully engaged and responded positively, demonstrating growing understanding and confidence. Staff also supported children effectively during welcome time, helping them to settle quickly and engage in their learning. This promoted the development of children's language, early numeracy, thinking skills and curiosity through play.

Staff missed opportunities to extend children's learning further. For example, when children showed curiosity about insects, interactions were not consistently used to deepen learning. We discussed how the use of high-quality interactions, such as "wondering aloud" and open-ended questioning, could further support children's curiosity, and inquiry skills. We have made an area for improvement (see area for improvement 1).

Outdoor learning experiences effectively promoted children's physical health and wellbeing. The environment offered a range of resources, including a mud kitchen, bikes, crates, grassed areas and wooden structures, which supported active play, balance and coordination. Children used resources imaginatively and often collaborated to develop shared ideas. This resulted in high levels of engagement, with children demonstrating creativity, confidence and enjoyment in their play.

We advised the service to review the outdoor environment regularly to ensure it remained safe and secure. Staff needed to pay particular attention to equipment positioned near the perimeter fence that could allow children to leave the area. We recommended the use of dynamic risk assessments to support ongoing safety. We were reassured that the service responded promptly, removing equipment positioned near the perimeter. This reduced potential risks and ensured children experienced a safe and more secure environment.

Staff used observations effectively to identify children's interests and inform child-centred planning. This supported the provision of relevant experiences and resources. Records clearly showed how children's learning was supported and what they had achieved and their next steps. This resulted in responsive planning and continuity in learning, supporting children to make sustained progress.

Staff had started to develop floor books to document children's learning. They reflected links to children's interests, staff roles and improvement planning. Some were presented in a scrapbook style, which reduced their clarity and impact. We suggested staff develop these further to strengthen their purpose, with clearer links to the curriculum, national guidance and children's rights. We recommended that staff consistently date entries to support more effective tracking of children's progress and more robust evaluation of practice over time. Strengthening the use of floor books would improve planning, documentation and continuity in children's learning.

Areas for improvement

1. To support children's learning, thinking and development, the provider should ensure staff consistently and effectively support children's play.

This should include, but not be limited to, the effective use of open-ended questioning to encourage deeper thinking.

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).

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 were kind, caring and nurturing. They responded well to children's cues, using praise, encouragement and reassurance. Their calm and consistent approach supported children's emotional wellbeing and sense of security. Key workers carried out daily wellbeing check-ins, which ensured they recognised and supported children's needs. This helped children to understand and express their feelings and feel confident in seeking help. As a result children were settled and felt safe and secure.

Children's personal care routines, were carried out with privacy and dignity. Staff demonstrated a nurturing and responsive approach, offering appropriate praise, reassurance and when needed distraction. This supported children to feel safe, secure and cared for.

Staff demonstrated a clear understanding of how to support children with additional support needs. They worked well with parents to develop settling-in approaches and support strategies. This helped children to express their choices and emotions with increasing confidence.

The lunchtime experience was variable in quality and did not consistently promote a calm environment. Children left the playroom and crossed the playground to the dining hall, which interrupted their play. The environment became busy with increased noise levels. Once in the dining hall, children sat in small groups and staff encouraged them to self-serve, with some children managing this independently. Staff ate alongside children to model positive mealtime interactions and offer support. However, the environment remained busy, with frequent movement. Management discussed plans to introduce a more flexible lunchtime approach within the playroom, allowing children to choose when to eat and supporting greater independence. We agreed this approach would reduce disruption, and support children to experience a more relaxed, individualised and positive mealtime. We have identified this as an area for improvement (see area for improvement 1).

Staff mostly completed accident and incident records appropriately and shared these with families using the relevant documentation. We observed some instances where it was not clear whether head injury advice had been shared with families. Strengthening this process would support greater clarity for families and promote consistency in practice.

We sampled medication and found multiple medication records and consent forms for individual children. The forms were not fully aligned with best practice guidance Management of medication in daycare of children and childminding services (July 2025 update). The recording of signs and symptoms on medication forms was not always clear. While this information was available elsewhere, it would benefit from being clearly documented within the medication records. This would ensure staff have immediate access to essential information. We were reassured that improvements were already being considered. To further strengthen practice, medication records should be stored alongside the medication. This would ensure staff can access them easily and provide safe, consistent care for children.

Children's wellbeing was supported through effective personal planning. A front overview sheet was a key strength, effectively capturing the child's voice and brought their experiences to life. Staff developed plans in partnership with families, ensuring they were central to all decisions relating to their children's care. Staff recorded each child's preferences, routines, likes and dislikes, demonstrating their knowledge of the children they supported. Care plans were further strengthened by in-depth chronologies, which were clearly evidenced in pastoral notes. As a result, children received well-planned, personalised care that supported their overall wellbeing.

Management and staff knew families well. They actively encouraged their involvement through enrolment visits, stay-and-play sessions, parents' evenings, sports days, cooking lessons and online learning journals. This demonstrated a clear commitment to partnership working, enabling families to engage in their child's experiences and contribute to the life of the service. Overall, this supported a welcoming, inclusive environment where families felt respected, informed and involved. Families agreed, with many sharing positive comments about the quality of care their children received. Their comments included "We have regular care plan reviews and have access to them whenever we want to see them." Additionally, "They have helped my child come on leaps and bounds" another added "It is an amazing service. We know our child is safe, nurtured and loved."

Areas for improvement

1. To improve children's wellbeing and experience at lunchtime, the provider should ensure the lunchtime experience is safe, calm and nurturing and supports children's independence and learning. This should include, but is not limited to:

(a) minimising interruptions to play and learning
(b) creating a more relaxed nurturing environment
(c) supporting children to make choices, develop independence and engage in a meaningful lunch experience.

This is to ensure that wellbeing is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state: "I can enjoy unhurried snack and meal times in as relaxed an atmosphere as possible." (HSCS 1.35)

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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