The Montessori Nursery School
Day Care of Children

Montessori Nursery School, Church of the Good Shepherd
13a Murrayfield Avenue
Murrayfield, Edinburgh
EH12 6AU

Telephone: 01313 468 921

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
2 September 2026

Service provided by:
Patricia Thornton

Service provider number:
SP2017989234

Service no:
CS2017358695

About the service

The Montessori Nursery School provides a daycare of children service in Edinburgh. The service are registered to provide care to a maximum of 25 children aged from two and a half years to entry to primary school age. There are currently 12 children registered with the service.
The nursery consists of one large playroom, a kitchen area, toilets and changing facilities. The playroom has free flow access to a small, secure outdoor space. Children also have access to a large garden area in the church grounds.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 01 and 02 September 2026 between 09:00 and 16:30. This inspection was carried out by one inspector from the Care Inspectorate. There were nine children attending on the day of the inspection.

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
- received four completed questionnaires from families using the service
- spoke with eight families during the inspection
- spoke with the Manager and Provider
- 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, no improvements were identified relating to core assurances.

Key messages

- Staff were highly skilled in supporting children's learning and progress.
- Children were confident, independent learners who took pride in their environment and used resources responsibly.
- Children benefited from skilled Montessori approaches which promoted curiosity, resilience and sustained engagement in learning.
- Staff and children developed positive, respectful relationships that enabled children to seek support and extend their learning with confidence.
- Leaders demonstrated a strong commitment to improvement and effectively aligned Montessori principles with national guidance and best practice.
- Families valued the service's child-centred ethos and told us children were respected as individuals.

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	5 - Very Good
Children play and learn	5 - Very Good
Children are supported to achieve	5 - Very Good

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

Leadership 5 - Very Good

We found major strengths in this aspect of the setting's work and identified very few areas for improvement; therefore, we evaluated this quality indicator as very good.

The service had a clear and well-established Montessori ethos which was evident throughout children's experiences, interactions and the learning environment. Staff demonstrated a strong understanding of the service's vision, values and aims, which were consistently reflected in practice through the promotion of independence, choice, respect, inclusion and children's rights. These values were embedded effectively in daily practice.

Feedback from families reinforced this positive culture, with parents describing the setting as child-centred, nurturing, respectful and responsive to individual needs. As a result, children experienced care and learning that reflected the service's values and supported positive relationships, wellbeing and engagement. One family told us "they are very child focused. They can tell you everything about each child. Very warm and welcoming like a family. They achieve what they set out to do".

The service demonstrated a strong commitment to delivering high-quality care and tailored learning through purposeful self-evaluation and reflective practice. Leaders gathered feedback from children, families and staff using a variety of approaches and used this information to inform decision making and support improvement. Family feedback was gathered through questionnaires, daily discussions, emails, parent meetings and opportunities for parents to observe practice. Leaders valued this feedback and used it to support service development.
The service improvement plan identified clear priorities for development. Leaders reviewed and updated the plan regularly to ensure it remained relevant and responsive to the needs of the setting. This supported a structured approach to continuous improvement and enabled the service to demonstrate progress across identified priorities. The service could strengthen this further by identifying clearer measures of success that strongly show the impact of improvement actions on outcomes for children and families.

A range of quality assurance systems supported leaders to monitor and improve practice. These included policy reviews, environmental checks, medication audits and accident and incident analysis. Leaders and staff made effective use of professional guidance, research and professional learning to inform improvements. Staff engaged regularly in reflective practice and evaluated children's experiences, the learning environment and the quality of provision. They were able to identify strengths and make appropriate changes to improve practice. As a result, children benefited from experiences that were responsive to their needs and supported positive outcomes.

Leaders had established robust recruitment and induction systems which supported the appointment of high-quality staff whose values aligned with those of the service. While the service had experienced some recent staff changes due to circumstances beyond its control, effective recruitment processes helped maintain stability and continuity for children and families. Clear records evidenced thorough recruitment checks and well-planned induction arrangements, supporting staff to understand their roles and responsibilities from the outset.

Leaders also gathered information through staff exit interviews and questionnaires, to evaluate staff experiences and identify opportunities for improvement. This reflective approach supported workforce

development and helped ensure the service remained responsive and well placed to recruit, support and retain staff who could deliver high-quality outcomes for children.

Children play and learn 5 - Very Good

We found major strengths in this aspect of the setting's work and identified very few areas for improvement; therefore, we evaluated this quality indicator as very good.

Children were highly engaged in play and learning for sustained periods of time. They confidently lead their own learning, followed their interests and made meaningful choices. They were active participants in the life of the nursery, taking responsibility for resources, snack preparation, tidying, and decision-making. This ensured high levels of motivation, curiosity and children's involvement in their learning.

The learning environment was very well resourced with high-quality, natural and open-ended materials that promoted creativity and exploration. Children demonstrated strong levels of concentration and perseverance as they engaged in activities including construction, bread making, puzzles, science and practical life experiences. This meant children were developing a range of skills that supported their learning and development.

Children demonstrated strong literacy and numeracy skills through meaningful experiences. They measured ingredients during baking, counted and sorted resources, and explored shape and pattern through construction activities with the Montessori Sensorial materials of differing dimensions. They engaged in storytelling and early writing opportunities and demonstrated a strong interest creating their own alphabet storybooks. Each story was linked to a different letter of the alphabet, with children developing narratives, creating illustrations and contributing ideas. Staff skilfully extended children's vocabulary and mathematical thinking through rich conversations and questioning. This meant children were developing skills and knowledge across a range of learning experiences.

Staff interactions were consistently highly responsive. Children would confidently and independently seek out staff to support and extend their learning. They invited staff to join them in "work", a term used within the setting when children wished to explore an interest in greater depth or develop their understanding further. Staff responded skilfully to these invitations, providing support and challenge while maintaining children's ownership of their learning. This supported children to develop confidence, curiosity and independence as learners. One family told us "they encourage independent exploration of learning. They take my child forward in all learning and help [them] to grow and explore in [their] own way".

Staff demonstrated an increasing understanding of child development and used this knowledge to support children's progress. They skilfully judged when to observe, when to provide support and when to extend learning. Effective questioning and rich language were used consistently to encourage curiosity, critical thinking and problem-solving. For example, staff used open-ended prompts such as "I wonder..." and "how" to deepen children's thinking and support exploration.
Planning was firmly rooted in children's interests, choices and emerging learning. Children influenced planning through floor books, mind maps, discussions and ongoing consultation, ensuring their views were central to the experiences provided. Children were treated as equal partners in their learning, reflecting the service's Montessori values and child-centred approach.

Observations, assessment and tracking information were used effectively to monitor children's progress and inform next steps in learning. Staff adapted experiences to provide challenge and support. They demonstrated a solid understanding of both the national early years curriculum and the Montessori

curriculum and had successfully integrated these approaches. They confidently articulated how learning experiences supported children's development and progression. Therefore children benefited from responsive experiences that promoted progress and positive outcomes for all children.

Children are supported to achieve — 5 - Very Good

We found major strengths in this aspect of the setting's work and identified very few areas for improvement; therefore, we evaluated this quality indicator as very good.

Staff were highly skilled in developing warm, caring and responsive relationships with children. They knew children very well and demonstrated a strong understanding of their individual personalities, interests and support needs. Staff responded sensitively to children's verbal and non-verbal cues throughout the day. They encouraged children to develop their skills in resolving their own conflicts and collaborating with others, while providing support when needed. As a result, children felt safe, secure and emotionally supported and were developing confidence in managing relationships and emotions.

Transitions were well planned and carefully tailored to children's individual needs. Staff recognised the importance of supporting children through periods of change and ensured transitions promoted continuity, and emotional wellbeing. For example, a child who was new to the setting experienced a gradual settling-in process that respected their pace and individual needs. Staff promoted attachment building and positive relationships throughout this process. This helped all children feel secure, develop trusting relationships and experience a strong sense of belonging within the setting.

The environment was calm and provided children with opportunities to play independently, socialise with others or access quieter spaces when required. Staff actively promoted children's rights and respected their choices about how and where they played. Children chose whether to play alone, with friends or in small groups, and staff supported them to understand the importance of respecting the choices of others when sharing spaces and resources. Children were confident in expressing their preferences and understood that their views mattered. This supported children's confidence, independence and self-esteem.

Mealtimes were calm, relaxed and a social experience, with staff sitting alongside children and engaging in meaningful conversations and positive interactions. Mealtimes made a significant contribution to children's self-help, and life skills. Children independently prepared snacks, safely cut fruit, poured drinks and took responsibility for managing the routines. Staff adopted a facilitative approach, encouraging children to lead their own experiences while providing support when required. This ensured children developed confidence, independence and a sense of responsibility through everyday routines.

Staff demonstrated a strong understanding of each child's individual needs, interests, and stages of development. They used this knowledge effectively throughout the day to provide responsive and personalised care. Staff recognised when children required additional encouragement, reassurance or challenge and responded sensitively to support their wellbeing and development. One family told us the service is "great with allergies, on the ball with medication getting forms filled out and updating care plan". This meant, children experienced care and support that was tailored to them as individuals. This helped them to feel secure, confident and able to thrive.

The service was highly effective at developing positive and trusting relationships with families. Families spoke very positively about the staff team. Communication was a strength and families valued daily conversations with staff, alongside regular updates through newsletters, emails and online learning journals. Parents expressed confidence in staff's management of children's individual needs and wellbeing support.

As a result, strong partnerships between families and staff helped ensure children experienced consistent, nurturing and responsive care.

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	5 - Very Good
Leadership and management of staff and resources	5 - Very Good

Children play and learn	5 - Very Good
Playing, learning and developing	5 - Very Good

Children are supported to achieve	5 - Very Good
Nurturing care and support	5 - Very Good

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