

Flexible Childcare Services (Aberdeenshire) – Huntly Day Care of Children

Aberdeenshire Council
The Gordon Schools
Huntly
AB54 4SE

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
20 July 2026

Service provided by:
Flexible Childcare Services Scotland
SCIO

Service provider number:
SP2019013370

Service no:
CS2019376988

About the service

Flexible Childcare Services (Aberdeenshire) - Huntly is registered to provide a care service for a maximum of nine children at any one time, who are of an age to attend school. The service was delivered from a classroom in The Gordon Schools, Huntly. The children had access to an outdoor space, kitchen area, toilets and a covered auditorium. The school was close to local amenities such as parks and shops.

There were four children present during the inspection.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 17 July 2026 between 09:30 and 15:15. 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:

- spent time with children using the service
- spoke with one of their parents/carers
- received five responses to our request for feedback from parents and staff
- spoke with staff and management
- 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

- Warm, nurturing relationships helped children feel safe, secure and valued.
- Improved indoor and outdoor spaces enhanced children's play experiences.
- Children were happy, engaged and supported to follow their interests.
- The service was well led with a supportive and consistent new staff team.
- Although family feedback was welcomed and had been used to make improvements, the setting should continue to develop parental engagement.
- Further development of planning and observations would strengthen learning experiences.

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 thrive and develop in quality spaces	4 - Good
Children play and learn	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Children are supported to achieve	5 - Very 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 key question as **good**, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

The setting currently worked within the wider Flexible Childcare Services vision, values and aims. As the club was now running regularly, there was an opportunity to develop its own vision, values and aims with staff, children and families. This would help ensure the service reflected the views of everyone involved and support their understanding of what the club aimed to provide.

The service was well led by a new manager who had supported the development of a new staff team, including a senior practitioner and playworkers. Staff told us they felt well supported and worked effectively together. Regular staff meetings were now in place, and staff were involved in reviewing and improving the service. For example, after moving to new premises, staff reviewed the environment and made changes to the layout and resources to enhance children's experiences. We discussed the benefits of engaging with the new quality improvement for school age childcare to support reflection and ongoing developments.

The setting gathered feedback from parents and had acted on the views it received. Parents had commented to the manager that they did not know staff well, which resulted in the recruitment of a consistent staff team. One parent told us this had already had a positive impact and felt the new staff members were welcoming and approachable. Plans were also in place to gather further feedback through a questionnaire at the end of the summer club. The setting valued family feedback and used it to make improvements.

An improvement plan had been developed and focused on areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. This had supported improvements to the environment, personal planning and medication procedures. Due to only operating a few sessions since the last inspection, work on planning, observations and parental engagement was ongoing. The newly appointed senior had plans to support these developments.

Staff spoke positively about their induction and training and felt these had supported them in their new roles. Further professional learning was planned, including training in intensive interactions. As staff developed confidence and experience, there would be opportunities for them to take on additional responsibilities and leadership roles.

Quality assurance processes were developing well. Policies were being reviewed and supported the smooth running of the service. An online quality assurance calendar supported audits and had contributed to improvements, particularly around medication procedures. The manager planned to introduce learning walks and more formal monitoring of practice now that the club was operating regularly. Staff also met before and after sessions to discuss children, reflect on practice and share information. Therefore, quality assurance systems were supporting improvement.

The setting followed safer recruitment procedures and had implemented a structured induction process for new staff. Regular probation meetings took place, and the national induction resource was used to support reflection and professional development. Staff felt supported and had a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities. Recruitment and induction arrangements were effective and supported staff to provide a good quality service for children and families.

Children thrive and develop in quality spaces 4 - Good

Quality Indicator: Children experience high quality spaces

We evaluated this key question as **good**, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Since the last inspection, the club had moved to new premises within a classroom at the academy. This provided children with access to a sensory room, quiet spaces, a covered outdoor area and free-flow access to the outdoors. The entrance area was welcoming, with key information displayed for families. Toilet and changing facilities were nearby and easily accessible. The move had improved the environment and created more opportunities for children's play.

Staff had recently reflected on children's experiences and made changes to the layout of the environment to better meet their needs. For example, the snack area had been moved closer to the kitchen, while quieter activities such as small world play and the cosy corner were positioned away from sensory and musical resources. Resources reflected children's individual interests and preferences. One child enjoyed exploring sensory resources, while another spent time engaging with water play and books. Children moved confidently around the space and appeared comfortable exploring different areas.

Staff used reflection effectively to improve future experiences. At the end of sessions, they discussed which resources children had enjoyed and which had not generated interest. This helped them plan activities and resources for future sessions. Although children did not access the wider community during the inspection, visits to the local park and walks around the town were planned, and parents spoke positively about these experiences.

Children benefited from free-flow access to outdoor spaces and moved naturally between indoor and outdoor environments. They used the outdoor area confidently and explored a range of experiences. Some children enjoyed throwing balls onto the roof and waiting for them to fall back down, showing curiosity and enjoyment in cause-and-effect play. Others engaged in water play, running and balancing on benches. There was scope to extend learning further through the addition of loose parts such as pipes and guttering to support water play. The outdoor environment supported children's play well and had potential for further development.

Practices were in place to keep children safe. Staffing levels ensured children were appropriately supervised, and staff communicated effectively when supporting children across different areas. Staff had access to walkie talkies to support this. Risk assessments were in place for the environment, activities and individual children and clearly identified risks and actions to reduce them. Staff used simple language and visual supports to help children understand how to stay safe. They were aware of children who had limited awareness of risk and provided additional support when needed.

The environment was clean, tidy and well maintained. Good infection prevention and control practices were followed, including regular cleaning, handwashing routines and the use of personal protective equipment when preparing food. Accident and incident procedures were in place, although none had been required to date. Information was stored securely, with children's records kept safely and electronic systems password protected. The setting had effective systems in place to support children's health, safety and wellbeing.

Children play and learn 3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

Quality Indicator: Playing, learning and developing

We evaluated this key question as **adequate/satisfactory**. While the strengths had a positive impact on outcomes for children, key areas need to improve.

Children were happy, settled and engaged throughout the inspection. They confidently chose where to play and accessed resources independently to support their interests. The pace of the day was led by children, allowing them time to explore their interests without unnecessary interruption. For example, one child spent time filling a water tray before exploring other areas and later returning to continue their play. Another child spent an extended period drawing using a variety of mark-making materials and digital technology. Children were also observed developing physical skills outdoors through climbing, balancing and exploring equipment. Children experienced meaningful play opportunities that supported curiosity, creativity and exploration.

Staff interactions were positive and supported children's experiences well. Staff were skilled at observing children's interests and joining play at the right time to encourage and extend learning. They used praise, descriptive language and modelling to support communication and understanding. For example, while a child was drawing on the smartboard, a staff member commented positively on the shapes and colours being used, showing genuine interest in what the child was creating. Staff also supported children's physical play, using repetitive language and encouragement while helping them jump safely. Children regularly invited staff into their play by taking them to resources and different areas, and staff responded warmly and positively. Staff interactions were a key strength of the service and supported children's experiences well.

The setting was beginning to create opportunities for children to develop skills for lifelong learning. Children were encouraged to be involved in everyday experiences and personal care routines where appropriate. For example, one child helped prepare fruit for snack, while another liked to organise their belongings before personal care routines. Children also had opportunities to explore digital technology through resources such as a smartboard, light board and interactive equipment. Children had opportunities to develop independence and confidence, though there was scope to continue extending these opportunities.

Planning and observations remained an area for improvement from the previous inspection. While staff used observations effectively to identify and respond to children's interests, planning had not yet been fully developed due to the limited number of sessions since the last inspection. The setting recognised the need to strengthen planning by ensuring there was a balance between intentionally planned experiences and those emerging from children's interests. Staff understood children's interests well however, developing their understanding of relevant theory would support them to enhance planning and observations. An area for improvement was made at the previous inspection and remains in place (**see section 'What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection' of this report**).

Staff worked closely with families to support children's experiences and wellbeing. The setting recognised that partnership working with other professionals may be required as children's needs changed or developed. Working together in this way would help ensure that appropriate support was in place for individual children to help them reach their full potential.

Children are supported to achieve 5 - Very Good

Quality Indicator: Nurturing care and support

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 very warm, nurturing and respectful in their interactions with children. Children appeared relaxed, happy and confident in the setting and approached staff for support when needed. Staff knew the children very well and responded quickly to their cues and needs. For example, when a child picked up a plate, staff recognised this as a sign they were ready for snack and responded appropriately. Children experienced caring and responsive support which helped them feel safe and secure.

Daily routines provided children with consistency while remaining flexible to meet individual needs. Children were familiar with handwashing and snack routines, and staff modelled expectations to support understanding. These routines helped children know what to expect and encouraged growing independence.

Transitions happened naturally throughout the session and were based on children's needs and interests. Staff used Makaton and visual supports to help children understand what was happening next and encouraged participation in a gentle and supportive way. Transitions were smooth with children moving between activities calmly and confidently.

The setting had effective systems in place to keep children safe. Staff had completed child protection training and were confident in recognising concerns and taking appropriate action. Chronologies were used appropriately to record significant events and identify any necessary follow-up. Since the last inspection, medication procedures had improved, with storage and administration now following best practice guidance. Safeguarding arrangements were effective and supported children's safety well.

Children's voices were valued and responded to throughout the session. Staff showed a strong understanding of different communication styles and adapted their approach to meet individual needs. Children used gestures, visual supports and communication devices to express themselves, and staff responded positively. For example, one child used a communication device to tell staff they had fallen, and staff immediately acknowledged and reassured them. Another child showed an interest in colours and objects, and staff responded by naming these at snack and during play. Children were supported well to communicate and make their views known.

Snack time was a calm, relaxed experience that took place at the children's own pace. Children were encouraged to wash their hands and sit together, supporting a sense of routine and belonging. One child confidently helped to prepare fruit, while others developed their independence by serving themselves fruit, pouring water and spreading crackers. Staff sat alongside the children, ensuring they were well supervised while also encouraging conversation and social interaction. Individual preferences and needs were respected, creating an inclusive and enjoyable experience for all.

Personal plans were in place for all children and provided a clear overview of their needs, interests and wellbeing. These had been developed in partnership with parents and included strategies to support individual children effectively. Plans were reviewed regularly and updates were requested however, the setting recognised that they did not always receive sufficient updated information from families, particularly for children who attended holiday club sessions only. The manager had plans in place to provide families with a questionnaire containing more specific questions before children returned. This would support the setting to gather the most up-to-date information available, ensuring staff are providing consistent care and support for the children.

Staff had been working on developing positive relationships with families and creating a welcoming atmosphere. Parents spoke positively about the consistent new staff team and the quality of communication. Families were welcomed into the setting and opportunities were provided to share information at the start and end of each session. Strong partnerships with families supported positive outcomes for 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

In order to promote children's health and wellbeing the manager and staff should ensure that they have sufficient information to support the safety of children. This should include but not be limited to:

- information and permission to administer children's medication
- information to support the assessment of risk for individual children
- up to date information on children's interests and preferences

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'My personal plan (sometimes referred to as a care plan) is right for me because it sets out how my needs will be met, as well as my wishes and choices' (HSCS 1.15).

This area for improvement was made on 14 July 2025.

Action taken since then

Medication procedures had improved, with storage and administration now following best practice guidance. Robust risk assessments were now in place for the environment, activities and individual children. These clearly identified risks and actions to reduce them. Personal plans had been developed in partnership with parents and provided a clear overview of each child's needs, interests, and wellbeing. The setting was reviewing its processes for gathering information for the children who attend holiday club only, ensuring that the most up-to-date and relevant information was available to support their individual needs.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

In order to support me to reach my full potential the staff should improve the system of observing, assessing and planning for my learning through positive play experiences.

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 14 July 2025.

Action taken since then

Planning and observations remained an area for improvement from the previous inspection. While staff used observations effectively to identify and respond to children's interests, planning had not yet been fully developed due to the limited number of sessions since the last inspection. The setting recognised the need to strengthen planning and observations by ensuring there was a balance between intentionally planned experiences and those emerging from children's interests.

This area for improvement has not been met and will remain in place.

Previous area for improvement 3

In order to further children's health and wellbeing and support their learning and development the provider and manager should provide premises which are welcoming and comfortable with resources which are stimulating and reflect children's interests.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I am able to access a range of good quality equipment and furnishings to meet my needs, wishes and choices' (HSCS 5.21)

This area for improvement was made on 14 July 2025.

Action taken since then

Since the last inspection, the club had moved to new premises within a classroom at the academy. This provided children with access to a sensory room, quiet spaces, a covered outdoor area and free-flow access to the outdoors. The move had improved the environment and created more opportunities for children's play.

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 thrive and develop in quality spaces	4 - Good
Children experience high quality spaces	4 - Good
Children play and learn	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Playing, learning and developing	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Children are supported to achieve	5 - Very Good
Nurturing care and support	5 - Very Good

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