Play Away ELC Ltd
Day Care of Children

Play Away ELC
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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
2 September 2026

Service provided by:
Play Away ELC Ltd

Service provider number:
SP2023000353

Service no:
CS2024000008

About the service

Play Away ELC Ltd is registered to care for up to 79 children not yet attending primary school. During the inspection, 38 children were present.

Children are cared for in two main play spaces across two floors and have access to an outdoor enclosed garden area. The play space on the bottom floor is open plan and divided into three sections to accommodate different age groups. Additionally, there is a playroom on the top floor for a group of children, aged three years to those not yet attending primary school, who mainly access half day sessions. Children also have access to a sensory room on the top floor to support small group play away from the busier playrooms.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 1 and 2 September 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 evaluation of the service we:

spoke with children
spoke with staff and management
observed practice and daily life
reviewed documents
reviewed feedback from families.

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 within the "Leadership" headings of this report.

Key messages

- Positive relationships supported children's wellbeing and learning.
- Outdoor play promoted independence, confidence and physical development.
- Families were actively involved in children's learning and experiences.
- Planning and learning records required further development to improve outcomes for children.
- Child protection practices must improve to ensure children are safeguarded.

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	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
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 3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

Quality indicator: Leadership and management of staff and resources

We evaluated different parts of this key question as adequate and good, with an overall grade of adequate, where strengths only just outweighed weaknesses.

The provider and manager had developed a stable staff team. Staff engaged positively throughout the inspection and demonstrated enthusiasm for their roles. They spoke confidently about the children they cared for and were receptive to professional discussion and suggestions for improvement. As part of the development of the service, the team had created the vision, values and aims based on their previous experiences. They were continuing to evolve as they got to know the community and families they served. This will allow a more inclusive approach for current families.

Staff were warm, nurturing and responsive in their interactions with children. We observed positive relationships and teamwork, with staff supporting one another well to meet children's needs. Staff deployment was generally working well and enabled children to experience continuity of care.

Staff had accessed training relevant to their roles and demonstrated good knowledge and skills in supporting children. There was a positive culture of professional learning, with staff expressing an interest in further training and development opportunities. Management had identified emerging leadership roles within the team, helping to build leadership capacity and support ongoing service development. This will support continued improvement within the service.

The management team had undertaken work to improve communication, staff engagement in training and development along with monitoring and self-evaluation arrangements to support the service development. New staff had engaged in a basic induction which helped them develop an understanding of their roles and responsibilities in relation to caring for children. Mentoring processes were also in the early stages of development, but had not yet been fully established due to some instabilities in the staff team. As this support evolves, we shared with management the opportunity to fully implement use of the National Induction Resource. This tool helps staff to reflect on and develop knowledge that supports delivery of consistently positive outcomes for children.

While child protection systems were established, some aspects of practice required further strengthening. Improvements were needed to ensure records, including chronologies and incident reporting, consistently provided a clear account of concerns, actions taken and outcomes for children. Opportunities were also identified to strengthen information-sharing and notification processes. Enhanced oversight in these areas will help ensure children benefit from timely, coordinated and well-documented safeguarding support (see requirement 1).

Quality indicator: Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

Staff demonstrated positive values and a commitment to providing nurturing care and support for children. Relationships between staff and children were warm, kind and respectful. Staff knew children well and responded sensitively to their individual needs, helping children to feel secure, valued and included.

The service benefited from a stable staff team who worked well together. Throughout the inspection, staff were enthusiastic about their roles and spoke confidently about children's care, learning and development. We observed positive teamwork, with staff supporting each other to ensure children's needs were met. Staff interactions promoted children's wellbeing and contributed to a calm and caring atmosphere.

Parents shared positive feedback about their relationships with staff. They found staff to be warm, caring and approachable and liked the strong bonds their children had developed with staff. Comments included:

"The care of our [child] is very good; [child is] always happily playing when we pick them up. Staff have a good relationship with [child]. Staff are always friendly and helpful when I speak to them."

"The teachers are friendly and welcoming. They always ask how our child is doing and ask if there are any issues. They understand that some children need extra support where needed."

Management were reviewing deployment arrangements, including children's movement between indoor and outdoor spaces, and had recently introduced visual supports to further enhance children's experiences. This was supporting children's independence. Staff across the setting worked well to support continuity for children by being supportive of each other during busy periods during the day. This was reflected in their practice, where they ensured that people felt supported within their roles. For example, staff automatically offered their support to other rooms when they had a quiet moment. This showed that people worked well together.

Staff had accessed training relevant to their roles and were able to apply their learning in practice. They demonstrated a willingness to continue developing their skills and identified areas of professional interest for future learning. The management team were beginning to recognise individual strengths within the team and had identified opportunities for staff to undertake additional leadership responsibilities. Champion roles had been set out and shared with parents; this will allow staff to focus on developing and improving specific areas of service delivery.

As a newly established team, staff were continuing to build confidence and develop their practice together. Some staff identified opportunities to further strengthen induction, mentoring arrangements and one-to-one support. Despite this, staff consistently demonstrated the skills, values and commitment needed to support positive outcomes for children. Their caring approach and effective teamwork contributed to children's positive experiences across the setting.

Requirements

1. By 31 December 2026, the provider must ensure that children are safe and protected from harm. To do this, the provider must, at a minimum:

a) ensure all management and staff with lead safeguarding responsibilities have a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities to keep children safe and secure from harm

b) ensure management and staff with lead safeguarding responsibilities are competent in reviewing chronologies and child protection records to assess the level of risk to children and any concerns identified are reported to the relevant authorities timeously.

This is to comply with Regulation 4(1)(a) of The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/210).

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: "I am protected from harm, neglect, abuse, bullying and exploitation by people who have a clear understanding of their responsibilities" (HSCS 3.20).

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 experienced positive opportunities for play and learning within a welcoming environment that reflected their interests, choices and developmental needs. We observed free-flow access to outdoor play for children on the ground floor. This approach supported children's independence, decision-making and wellbeing as they moved freely between indoor and outdoor environments. The service should now consider how similar opportunities could be extended to children in the upstairs playrooms to ensure equitable access to outdoor experiences.

The outdoor environment was well used and children were engaged in their play. Children particularly enjoyed using the bikes and demonstrated confidence, coordination and physical skills as they navigated the outdoor space. Children were also observed using tyres for balancing and challenge. Staff remained attentive and responsive, providing encouragement and support, where required, while allowing children to take appropriate risks and develop confidence. Staff recognised children's interest in balancing and physical challenge. The outdoor environment could be further enhanced through the introduction of additional loose parts to enhance curious play opportunities for children. The consideration of designated routes for wheeled toys could help with management of space to use physical apparatus. Parents shared positive feedback on outdoor play, including: "I have observed (or seen in pictures) my child using fixed and loose parts in the outdoor area (e.g. slide, tunnel). [Child] has also been seen using the tricycle and engaging in messy play using sand, water, and paint." Other parents commented that children accessed the garden on a regular basis.

Positive interactions supported children's learning and development. Staff engaged warmly with children and, at times, extended learning through responsive practice. We observed staff reading stories, singing with children, exploring bugs outdoors and supporting children to investigate and problem-solve through play. Children appeared settled, happy and engaged in their learning experiences. Management recognised that developing consistently high-quality interactions remained a key improvement priority as they continued to strengthen the skills and confidence of the staff team.

The service had recently reorganised playrooms and invested in resources to better meet children's needs. The sensory room was used well and could be booked for small group experiences or individual support sessions. This provided children with opportunities to regulate emotions and relax and engage in sensory exploration within a calm environment.

Planning systems were at an early stage of development. The management team had appropriately tailored expectations to the needs of a relatively new staff team and were focused on building relationships, confidence and shared approaches to practice. Staff were beginning to develop planning based on group interests and needs, with planning being supported by a senior member of staff as staff skills developed and evolved. Meaningful observations were being developed. However, these required further monitoring to ensure they were child-centred, outcome-focused and clearly identified individual next steps in learning. The service recognised the need to strengthen planning for individual children and focus on quality rather than quantity of observations. Parents spoke positively about learning journals and valued the regular updates they received regarding their child's experiences and progress.

Staff demonstrated an emerging understanding of schematic play and recognised opportunities to further develop this area of practice to enhance children's learning and engagement. Overall, children experienced good-quality play and learning opportunities within a nurturing environment, supported by a management team that had a clear understanding of areas for continued improvement.

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 warm, caring and nurturing support from staff who were kind in their approach and responsive to individual needs. We observed positive relationships between staff and children. Staff knew children well and demonstrated a good understanding of their personalities, preferences and routines. As a result, children appeared settled, secure and confident within the setting.

The service had created a welcoming environment where children and families were valued and respected. We observed families being warmly greeted on arrival and departure, and staff took time to share information about children's experiences, achievements and wellbeing. This helped to promote positive partnerships with families and supported continuity of care between home and the setting.

Mealtimes were calm, relaxed and unhurried, providing children with positive social experiences. In most instances, staff sat alongside children, creating opportunities for conversation and supporting children's wellbeing during meals. Children appeared comfortable and enjoyed the social aspects of eating together. There were occasions when staff became focused on tasks, which reduced opportunities to remain fully engaged with children throughout the mealtime experience. The service could further enhance mealtimes by increasing opportunities for children to develop independence and life skills through self-serving all meals. As the service continues to develop practice, consideration should be given to introducing more flexible or rolling mealtimes to enable children to complete play experiences naturally before choosing to eat. This will allow children more opportunities to lead their own play and learning throughout the day.

Personal plans were in place for children and had been developed in partnership with families. These were regularly reviewed and updated to reflect any changes in children's routines, preferences and care needs. Snapshot documents provided staff with accessible information about how best to support individual children and contributed to consistent care. There were some gaps in how information shared with partnership agencies and families was recorded. We shared this with management on the first day of the inspection. This provided us with some assurances. The service should continue embedding their approach to recording significant information about children's needs. This helps to ensure children are provided with consistently high quality care and support.

The service demonstrated a commitment to supporting children with additional support needs. Individual strategies had been identified and were available to guide staff practice. The appointment of a champion role for staff to lead on supporting children with additional support needs provided a positive foundation for continued improvement, and this role was expected to strengthen support further as staff developed their knowledge and confidence. This will ensure that staff can continue to offer an inclusive environment that supports all families and children to reach their potential.

A range of approaches had been implemented to encourage family engagement. Newsletters kept families informed about events and developments within the service. Home learning bags and initiatives such as Play Along Maths supported learning beyond the setting and encouraged families to be involved in their child's development. These initiatives helped strengthen relationships between the service and families and promoted shared approaches to children's learning and wellbeing.

Parents shared positive feedback on the service including: "This was my [child's] first nursery, [child] joined when they were 1 year old, [child] moved between all rooms and they learned a lot and really enjoy their time in Play Away."

Other parents told us they liked the keyworkers, children were "happy" and they liked the range of experiences their children had access to. This showed that the service was committed to building strong relationships 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

To support children's health, wellbeing and safety, the provider should ensure children are cared for in a clean environment.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: "'My environment is secure and safe" (HSCS 5.19) and "I experience an environment that is well looked after with clean, tidy and well maintained premises, furnishings and equipment" (HSCS 5.24).

This area for improvement was made on 8 September 2025.

Action taken since then

There had been a lot of work done cleaning, reorganising and adding new resources to the service. This was reflective of the ongoing upgrade programme. Areas were observed to be clean, well-maintained and in a good state of repair.

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	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Leadership and management of staff and resources	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment	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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