Marress House Early Years Centre
Day Care of Children

Marress House
Friars Croft
IRVINE
KA11 8EE

Telephone: 01294 324000

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
13 May 2026

Service provided by:
North Ayrshire Council

Service provider number:
SP2003003327

Service no:
CS2024000331

About the service

Marress House Early Years Centre provides a care service to a maximum of 55 children not yet attending primary school at any one time - no more than 55 are aged 2 years to those not yet attending primary school full time, with no more than 15 aged 2 to under 3.

The service is provided by North Ayrshire Council and is located within the town of Irvine. It is well situated, offering convenient access to local amenities, including shops, public transport links, green spaces and a range of community facilities.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Tuesday 12 and Wednesday 13 May 2026 between 10:15 and 18:30. Feedback was provided to the service on Wednesday 13 May 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 registration and complaints information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered throughout the inspection year.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with children using the service
- reviewed electronic feedback from 19 parents/carers
- spoke with staff and the senior leadership team
- observed practice and daily life for children
- 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.

As part of this inspection, we undertook a focus area. We have gathered specific information to help us understand more about how services support children's safety, wellbeing and engagement in their play and learning. This included reviewing the following aspects:

- staff deployment
- safety of the physical environment, indoors and outdoors
- the quality of personal plans and how well children's needs are being met
- children's engagement with the experiences provided in their setting.

This information will be anonymised and analysed to help inform our future work with services.

Key messages

- Leaders demonstrated a clear, shared vision with high expectations for staff and positive outcomes for children and families.
- Self-evaluation and quality assurance processes were effective in supporting continuous improvement, with scope to strengthen how impact is consistently evidenced.
- The setting was welcoming, well-organised and thoughtfully resourced, supporting children's engagement, independence and learning.
- The indoor environment was a particular strength, and the outdoor space offered worthwhile opportunities for children to access fresh air regularly and develop lifelong skills.
- Staff demonstrated a very good understanding of child development, providing consistently engaging and meaningful play experiences that supported children's learning and progression.
- Interactions and planning were responsive and effective, enabling children to develop confidence, curiosity and a broad range of skills.
- Children experienced warm, responsive and nurturing care that supported their wellbeing, confidence and sense of security.
- Care practices were effective overall, with some opportunities to strengthen the consistency of recording to further enhance the quality of support.

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 thrive and develop in quality spaces	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.

Leadership and management of staff and resources

Leaders demonstrated a clear and shared vision, underpinned by high expectations for staff and positive outcomes for children and families. Children, families and staff were meaningfully involved in shaping this vision, resulting in strong shared ownership and a consistent, values-driven approach across the setting. As a result, children experienced respectful, nurturing relationships that promoted independence. They were confident, engaged and actively involved in their play, supported by a secure ethos that encouraged enquiry-based learning.

Staff engaged in self-evaluation using a range of approaches, enabling the team to identify meaningful priorities for improvement. These included strengthening family engagement, embedding a rights-based approach and enhancing creativity in play. Priorities were carefully planned and implemented in a structured, sustainable way, with clear links to children's rights, interests and needs. Improvements were responsive and increasingly well measured. While approaches to family engagement had led to increased participation, evaluation did not always clearly demonstrate impact or inform next steps. Strengthening monitoring processes could support a clearer understanding of outcomes and further drive continuous improvement.

Communication systems, including cloakroom information, pictorial displays of the improvement plan and newsletters shared within the service and digitally, supported engagement and information sharing. One parent commented "We have been given the opportunity at stay and play sessions to make suggestions towards the centres values, complete evaluations on how the centre is doing and how they can improve." Another said, "My views are gathered through email, group call, stay and plays with feedback forms." Overall, these approaches created opportunities for families to be involved in the life of the setting and supported children's learning and wellbeing. The service could continue to strengthen its approaches to consultation to help all families understand how their views were contributing to ongoing improvement.

Internal quality assurance processes were well developed and informed by a range of evidence, including audits, observations and staff feedback. This supported leaders to identify strengths and areas for development, which were shared clearly with staff alongside expectations, responsibilities and timescales. Improvements were regularly revisited and monitored, contributing to a consistent and coherent approach to practice. This had a positive impact on staff confidence and skills, which in turn improved outcomes for children.

Staff were recruited in line with local authority procedures. The manager was registered with the General Teaching Council for Scotland, and staff were registered with the Scottish Social Services Council, supporting compliance with professional standards. Staff reported feeling valued, supported and motivated by leaders. Induction, mentoring and coaching were well-structured and consistently implemented, enabling staff to build confidence, understand expectations and develop strong relationships with children and families. Staff development was aligned to service priorities and strengthened practice, leading to improved outcomes for children. This supported the development of distributed leadership roles and effective knowledge sharing across the team, contributing to consistent practice and high-quality experiences for children.

Children thrive and develop in quality spaces — 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 experience high quality spaces

The service was accommodated within a newly transformed building that provided a welcoming, well-equipped indoor and outdoor environment, supporting children's experiences.
Children benefited from well-defined play spaces, including the studio, living room, kitchen, outdoor learning environment and the 'illuminaire' room. These areas offered rich and engaging experiences that supported and extended children's learning. As a result, children moved confidently between spaces and made meaningful choices, promoting independence and decision-making within safe, supportive boundaries.

Resources and materials were varied, adaptable and responsive to children's abilities, needs and interests. Carefully selected furnishings and resources supported a child-centred approach, enabling children to lead their play. Pre-owned furniture in the living room and kitchen areas contributed to a homely and comforting environment. As a result, children made independent choices and sustained meaningful engagement in their play.

Staff demonstrated skill in recognising when to introduce or adapt resources, and when to observe or sensitively intervene. This supported children to develop problem-solving skills, resilience and positive relationships. Resources across the environment encouraged creativity, early literacy, numeracy and scientific enquiry, which were embedded naturally in play. This enabled children to sustain engagement, deepen their learning and develop transferable skills.
The outdoor environment was well-used and supported children to assess and manage risk through risk-benefit play. Children accessed outdoor play daily, which supported their confidence, resilience, health and wellbeing. Children also benefited from regular opportunities to engage with their local community, enhancing their sense of belonging and broadening their experiences.

The environment was thoughtfully organised and engaging, with stronger development evident indoors than outdoors. The outdoor space continued to provide worthwhile learning opportunities for children. Leaders were aware of this and had identified plans to further enhance the outdoor environment, including involving children and families. Further development in this area could support a more balanced learning experience across all environments.

Staff demonstrated a clear understanding of their responsibilities in maintaining a safe and secure environment. Children were appropriately supervised and security arrangements were robust. As a result, children played safely and confidently.

The environment was well-maintained and supported children's comfort and wellbeing. Staff had completed infection prevention and control training, contributing to a clean, safe and hygienic environment. Effective cleaning routines and food safety practices further supported children's health.

Children's personal information was managed securely, with effective systems in place, including the safe handling of electronic information in line with data protection guidance. This upheld children's right to privacy and gave families confidence in how information was managed.

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.

Playing, learning and developing

Staff demonstrated a very good understanding of child development, which informed their daily interactions and planning for learning. They provided a well-judged balance of intentional and responsive play experiences. As a result, children were highly motivated, actively engaged and demonstrated curiosity and emerging enquiry skills.

Early literacy, numeracy and science were effectively promoted across play. Children demonstrated transferable skills in both the indoor play kitchen and outdoor mud kitchen, independently using real foods and tools to prepare pretend meals. This supported curiosity, language development and sensory exploration. Children communicated confidently with peers and familiar and visiting adults about their play.

Responsive adult interactions further supported the development of numeracy, language and scientific enquiry. Children explored shapes, colours and patterns, and used a sensory light box to investigate shadows. Staff extended learning effectively by encouraging children to identify transparent and opaque objects, strengthening vocabulary and understanding of new concepts.

In the block play area, children used mark-making to design structures and engaged in meaningful discussions with adults about different types of houses around the world. This built on prior learning about their local community and supported understanding of environmental print and the wider world. Staff encouraged children to share their own experiences and used questioning to introduce early positional language, extending thinking and creativity.

Children's creativity was further enhanced through opportunities such as designing and creating an outdoor obstacle course. This promoted collaboration, physical development and engagement in risk-benefit play, supporting confidence and resilience. A wide range of creative experiences was available, including mark-making across different surfaces and the use of unconventional materials such as fabrics, textured mats and windows. This enabled children to experiment freely, develop creativity and explore cause and effect.

Children were central to planning. Staff used skilled observations to identify interests and inform next steps. Assessment was clearly linked to individual needs, supporting personalised learning and progression at an appropriate pace. Information was shared effectively between staff and with families, supporting continuity in children's learning.

Interactions were warm and responsive, with staff attuned to children's verbal and non-verbal communication. This supported children's confidence, curiosity and emotional wellbeing. Through modelling and responsive support, staff promoted the development of communication, language, movement and social skills. Where additional support was required, this was identified and planned for appropriately. For example, staff trained in British Sign Language shared their knowledge across the team, supporting an inclusive environment where all children were encouraged to express themselves and try new experiences.

Staff worked with families to share information about children's learning and celebrate achievements. Children accessed their paper learning journals within the setting, supporting reflection on their progress. Information was also shared through organised events with families to discuss children's learning and next steps. A small number of parents indicated that these sessions could feel busy at times and may not always fully support privacy. This feedback was shared with the leadership team to inform further improvement.

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.

Nurturing care and support

Staff demonstrated a very good understanding of the importance of nurturing relationships in supporting children's wellbeing and development. They were consistently kind, gentle and respectful, and actively promoted children's rights. This was evident in the positive interactions observed. Children showed care, cooperation and a willingness to share and support one another during play. Staff used warm, familiar language such as 'little buddies' and 'my friend,' which fostered a strong sense of belonging and emotional security. As a result, children experienced warm, responsive care and were confident, engaged and able to express themselves.

The setting was welcoming, calm and inclusive, offering a range of spaces that supported social interaction, emotional regulation and play. Staff were attentive and responsive to emotional needs, providing reassurance and promoting a strong sense of safety. Children's independence, privacy and dignity were consistently respected. Staff adapted their support to reflect individual needs and stages of development, demonstrating thoughtful and reflective practice. Personal care was carried out sensitively, promoting independence while maintaining comfort and respect. As a result, children experienced care that enhanced their confidence, wellbeing and sense of security.

Transitions, including handovers, were well supported through familiar adults and consistent routines, helping children feel secure and settled. A range of communication approaches, including verbal exchanges, written information and events, kept families informed and included, which was valued by most parents. One parent commented, "Staff know each of us by name. Management are at the door every morning and night. We talk about everything - they care about the smallest things." Another said, "Staff are always welcoming friendly and polite . Always there to answer any questions needed." This demonstrated that strong, trusting relationships were built, enhancing families' experiences.

A small number of parents indicated that more detailed daily updates, particularly about children's play experiences and what they had eaten, could have further enhanced their experience. This feedback was shared with the leadership team, who were receptive and planned to use it to support ongoing improvement and further strengthen partnerships with families.

Mealtimes were positive and socially engaging experiences that promoted independence and a sense of responsibility. Staff sat alongside children, ensuring safety and providing positive, consistent role modelling. Interactions were warm and inclusive, contributing to children's sense of security. Meals were provided in line with current guidance, with appropriate consideration of individual dietary needs and allergies. As a result, children developed independence, social skills and positive attitudes towards food and health.

Children's wellbeing was supported through personal planning that reflected their strengths, needs and interests. Plans informed practice and were reviewed to reflect changing needs. Staff demonstrated a clear understanding of children in their care, ensuring support was responsive and individualised. While generally effective, a small number of records had not yet been fully updated to reflect recent changes already noted in children's medical information. Although relevant information was available to staff, ensuring all associated documentation was updated promptly would have further strengthened consistency across records.

Positive relationships with families enhanced experiences and wellbeing. Staff demonstrated a clear understanding of the influence of family, community and life experiences on children's development. They responded sensitively to individual circumstances and worked effectively with relevant community partners to build trust and encourage engagement. This ensured continuity of care and contributed to improved outcomes for children.

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

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Leadership and management of staff and resources	5 - Very Good

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Children experience high quality spaces	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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