Cairns Early Childhood Centre
Day Care of Children

Kilmarnock

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
11 September 2025

Service provided by:
East Ayrshire Council

Service provider number:
SP2003000142

Service no:
CS2003014091

About the service

Cairns Early Childhood Centre is a daycare for children service situated in Kilmarnock, East Ayrshire. The service is provided by East Ayrshire Council. It is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 154 children not yet attending primary school at any one time: No more than a maximum of 145 children aged two years to those not yet attending primary school; of whom no more than a maximum of 25 children are aged two to under three years; and no more than nine are aged under two years. On the day of inspection, the service had 120 children registered; 81 children were present, all between the ages of 0 and to not yet attending primary school, on day one of the inspection and 80 on day two.

The service has sole use of the premises and outdoor play area. Children can freely move between indoors and a secure outdoor area. The centre is within walking distance of local amenities.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection conducted by three inspectors from the Care Inspectorate. It took place on 9, 10, and 11 September 2025. The inspectors attended the service between 09:10 and 15:15 hours on 9 September, from 08:30 to 16:30 hours on 10 September, and from 11:30 to 16:15 hours on 11 September.

To prepare for the inspection, we reviewed information about the service. This included registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- observed practice and daily life
- spoke with children using the service
- reviewed documents
- spoke with the manager and staff
- received 29 completed questionnaires from parents/carers to gather their views and feedback.

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.

Key messages

- Warm care supported children's wellbeing, though responsiveness during busy times needed further improvement.
- Children led creative play, with staff extending learning through responsive interactions and thoughtful questioning.
- Children benefit from a welcoming environment; hygiene, supervision, and resources require ongoing attention.
- Leaders promoted improvement through collaboration and reflection, with systems developing to support consistent, positive outcomes.
- Staff worked flexibly and compassionately, though further training would strengthen consistency and emotional support for children.

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

How good is our care, play and learning?	4 - Good
How good is our setting?	4 - Good
How good is our leadership?	4 - Good
How good is our staff team?	4 - Good

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

How good is our care, play and learning? 4 - Good

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

Quality indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support

Staff interactions were often warm and caring, with some children receiving comfort and affection. During busy periods, however, staff struggled to meet individual needs, particularly when several children were observed to be upset at the same time. This meant children were not always responded to promptly. A few children were new to the service and still settling; while staff made efforts to support them, responses were not always fully attuned to their emotional cues. Strengthening staff awareness and responsiveness would help build secure attachments and promote a more nurturing environment.

Children's achievements were celebrated through initiatives like "Star of the Week" and "Golden Tickets," which children responded to positively. Personal care was carried out with dignity and respect, and staff monitored sleeping children to ensure their safety. Water bottles were accessible, and children used keyworker group pictures to identify where to store them, promoting independence.

Mealtimes varied in quality. On one day, lunch was noisy and task-focused, with limited social interaction. Improvements were noted the following day, with a calmer atmosphere and prompts on tables to encourage conversation. The layout change contributed to a more positive experience.

Personal plans were up to date, and updates were made to reflect recent changes in children's circumstances. Parents shared that, "I update the keyworker and the information goes in my child's plan," and "Staff informs me of targets set and ensures I agree with targets."

Medication was stored appropriately, and processes were in place to keep children safe. Staff had strong links with professionals such as health visitors, speech and language therapists, which supported positive outcomes for children and families. All staff had completed child protection training and understood their roles and responsibilities.

Quality indicator 1.3: Play and learning.

Children engaged in a mix of spontaneous and planned play experiences that reflected their interests. Staff responded positively to children's ideas, such as joining in hairdresser role play and encouraging others to participate. A parent shared, "Lots of activities available daily." These interactions supported creativity, social development, and imaginative play.

Staff used effective questioning to extend learning, particularly outdoors. For example, children explored how to fix a greenhouse that had blown over, prompting problem-solving and critical thinking. Opportunities to develop language, literacy, and numeracy were evident, though this remained a work in progress. A parent told us, "My child gets to do a range of activities, ranging from math to literacy, age dependent."

Staff plan activities based on each child's interests and stage of development, creating a nurturing and

engaging learning environment. They take care to recognise and celebrate children's achievements, while tracking progress in meaningful ways.

To help families stay connected and informed, staff should share key learning moments more regularly in clear and accessible formats. This will support strong partnerships and help families enjoy and understand their child's experiences.

Learning journals reflected a range of approaches, with many containing detailed monthly observations that captured children's progress well. Staff were encouraged to continue sharing significant milestones in real time to celebrate achievements and support children's development as they happen. This ongoing focus will help ensure all entries consistently reflect the rich experiences and learning taking place.

Children had some opportunities to explore their wider community, such as visiting local shops to choose snacks. However, staffing challenges limited the frequency of these experiences. Staff were aware of the impact and continued to prioritise children's safety and wellbeing.

How good is our setting? 4 - Good

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

Quality indicator 2.2: Children experience high quality facilities.

Children were cared for in a friendly and supportive environment that helped them feel happy and secure. Staff were kind and paid close attention to the children, creating a space where they felt safe and respected. The setting included some homely features that made it feel cosy. In a few areas, adding softer furnishings and decorations at children's eye level could make the space even more comforting and emotionally supportive.

The setting benefitted from natural light and ventilation, contributing to a pleasant atmosphere. However, a persistent odour was noted in the toilet area. This had been raised at the previous inspection. On this occasion, some toilets had not been flushed, which may have contributed to the issue. Staff were reminded to monitor this area closely to maintain a fresh and hygienic environment.

Indoor and outdoor spaces were generally well laid out and had improved since the last inspection. On the second day of the visit, the layout was more effective in supporting children's play and movement. While larger areas provided ample space, some gaps encouraged running. Staff were aware of this and were working to address it. Resources supported children's curiosity and interests, and further development of natural and sensory materials would strengthen the learning environment.

Children accessed outdoor play freely and confidently, with staff providing support when needed. In some areas, staff responded to children's cues to go outside, although access was not always readily available. Parents shared, "My child loves playing with the mud kitchen and just being outside," and "My child loves the outdoors, the nursery has a great space for the children to play and explore outside with mud kitchen, role play, arts and crafts and a slide, which all the children love." Planning records and observations indicated that some outdoor equipment was not consistently accessible due to staffing constraints. Staff were aware of this and were working to improve access.

Infection prevention and control practices were mostly followed. Children washed their hands at appropriate times, and staff supported this well. However, some hygiene concerns were noted, including visibly dirty bin lids and outdoor toys requiring cleaning. Staff were reminded of the importance of maintaining hygiene standards across all areas.

Risk assessments were in place and generally understood by staff. However, not all staff were familiar with the plan. This had been discussed during an inset day, and staff were reminded of its importance to ensure consistent safety practices.

Outdoor areas required some maintenance, including litter picking and removal of rubbish near play spaces. The fire pit area and surrounding environment should be cleared before use to ensure safety and cleanliness. Addressing these issues will support the continued development of a high-quality, safe, and engaging environment for all children.

How good is our leadership? 4 - Good

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

Quality indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well.

The service had begun reviewing its vision, values, and aims to reflect the arrival of new families and staff. This demonstrated a commitment to ensuring the ethos of the setting remained relevant and inclusive.

Leaders created conditions where staff were generally informed of changes and encouraged to share responsibility for improvement. Staff held leadership roles in areas such as eco initiatives, literacy, parental engagement, and rights-respecting schools. Most staff felt their views were valued, although a few expressed that they did not always feel listened to. Staff had contributed to setting priorities for the improvement plan and engaged in self-evaluation using 'How good is our early learning and childcare?' and the Care Inspectorate's quality framework.

Children and families were actively involved in shaping improvements. Feedback was gathered through regular questionnaires and events such as stay-and-play sessions. Parents told us about being included in the setting, "I have attended bookbug session and stay and play days," and "Feedback is always asked for during stay and play days. Questionnaire on learning journals linking to improvement plan." Families appreciated opportunities to engage with their children in the setting, though some suggested that more staff would enhance the experience.

Children were clearly at the heart of the service's improvement journey. The current improvement plan reflected the needs of the setting, and staff had identified training needs, including trauma-informed practice. Staff expressed interest in accessing further professional development to support their roles.

Monitoring of staff practice, personal plans, and learning journals was beginning to show a positive impact. Gaps were identified, and actions were taken to clarify expectations and improve consistency. For example, a thorough audit of accidents and incidents had been completed, though some actions, such as implementing a safety plan for children, had not yet been addressed in a timely manner.

A high number of notifications and accident records had been logged, and the service had taken steps to reduce future occurrences. Risk assessments had been updated in response to incidents, though further detail was needed to ensure they fully supported staff understanding and children's safety.

Overall, the service demonstrated a reflective and proactive approach to improvement, with clear systems in place to support ongoing development and positive outcomes for children.

How good is our staff team? 4 - Good

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

Quality indicator 4.3: Staff deployment.

The service had a positive mix of staff skills and experience, which supported children's care and learning well. Recent staffing changes, including new appointments and team reorganisation, meant staff were still getting to know each other and developing effective ways of working together.

Staff breaks were well managed and did not interrupt children's experiences. Communication between staff was effective throughout the day. They kept each other informed about transitions, outdoor play, and changes in routine, which helped maintain safe supervision and flexibility during busy periods.

Staffing levels met required ratios and ensured basic supervision. However, at times, the number of staff available did not fully meet the individual needs of all children. During one busy period, staff found it difficult to comfort children who were upset or unsettled. This showed that more responsive care and emotional support were needed during key transitions.

Staff had a good understanding of best practice guidance and relevant legislation. They contributed to the service's improvement planning and used national frameworks such as 'How good is our early learning and childcare?' and the Care Inspectorate's quality framework to reflect on and improve their work. This had led to positive developments, including themed stay-and-play sessions and a termly enrolment day.

Staff were motivated and caring, with strong relationships evident between staff, children, and families. Most staff felt passionate about their roles, though some shared that they occasionally felt overwhelmed, especially when supporting children with dysregulated behaviour. Many expressed a desire for more professional learning to help them better meet the needs of children with complex needs.

Staff had regular opportunities for professional development through team meetings, in-service days, and leadership roles. They reported feeling well supported by the management team, both personally and professionally.

All staff were registered with the appropriate regulatory bodies, and no concerns were identified.

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

The senior management and staff should review children's personal plans to ensure they identify children's next steps in learning and outline how the service plans to meet individual children's health welfare and safety needs. Plans should be reviewed with children and parents within a six-month period, or sooner if required.

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 1 December 2022.

Action taken since then

Children's personal plans were up to date and clearly outlined individual targets and strategies to support progress. Plans had been developed in partnership with parents and were appropriately signed and dated. This demonstrated a consistent approach to meeting children's health, welfare, and safety needs, in line with the Health and Social Care Standards.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

Children should have access to a range of rich, stimulating play resources to support their development. The manager and staff should ensure that areas within the playrooms are developmentally appropriate and resourced to meet the individual needs of children.

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 can direct my own play and activities in the way that I choose, and freely access a wide range of experiences and resources suitable for my age and stage, which stimulate my natural curiosity, learning and creativity' (HSCS 2.27).

This area for improvement was made on 1 December 2022.

Action taken since then

Children now have access to a wide range of rich and stimulating play resources that support their learning and development. Playroom areas are well organised, developmentally appropriate, and resourced to meet the individual needs of children. As a result, children are able to direct their own play, explore their interests, and engage in experiences that promote curiosity, creativity, and progression.

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.com.

Detailed evaluations

How good is our care, play and learning?	4 - Good
1.1 Nurturing care and support	4 - Good
1.3 Play and learning	4 - Good

How good is our setting?	4 - Good
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	4 - Good

How good is our leadership?	4 - Good
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	4 - Good

How good is our staff team?	4 - Good
4.3 Staff deployment	4 - Good

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Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

enquiries@careinspectorate.com

0345 600 9527

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