

Cairns Early Childhood Centre Day Care of Children

Kilmarnock

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
19 June 2026

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. At the time of our inspection, 140 children were registered with the service.

The service has sole use of the premises and the 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 which took place on Wednesday, 17; Thursday, 18; and Friday, 19 June 2026; between the hours of 09:00 and 15:15 on day one, 08:30 and 17:30 on day two, and 10:30 and 12:30 on day three. The inspection was carried out by three 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:

- spoke with children using the service
- received completed electronic questionnaires from 10 families and 13 members of staff
- spoke with the staff and the management team
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents
- assessed core assurances, including the physical environment.

As part of this inspection, we assessed 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.

During this inspection, we 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.

Key messages

- Children, families and staff shaped the service's direction, helping everyone feel included and moving toward shared goals.
- Staff now need time, support and confidence to embed the vision and strengthen consistent, high-quality practice across all rooms.
- Children enjoyed rich play experiences that supported curiosity, creativity and confidence indoors and outdoors.
- More consistent resources and interactions across playrooms would deepen learning and ensure all children experience high quality play.
- Warm, responsive care and strong relationships helped children feel safe, secure and included in daily routines.

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 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 4 - Good

Quality indicator: Leadership and management of staff and resources

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.

The service had involved children, families and staff in shaping the vision, values, and aims. Their contributions were visible in displays and early discussions with staff. This helped families feel included and supported in a shared direction. However, the vision, values and aims were still in the early stages of being embedded. Staff, children, and families needed more time and ongoing support to fully understand and use them in daily practice. For example, paperwork linked to the vision, values and aims was in place, but staff were still developing confidence in using it consistently to guide everyday interactions and conversations with families.

Leaders promoted the service's values, and there was some evidence of these being used in daily practice. This supported a positive culture and helped staff understand expectations. Staff now needed more encouragement to contribute to change and share responsibility for improvement. Empowering the whole team to feel valued, listened to, and confident in shaping practice would strengthen consistency across the service. A parent shared, "We are provided questionnaires to voice our opinions on what would make the establishment better."

Quality assurance processes were beginning to have an impact, particularly in the 3-5 room, where improvements were more evident in children's learning and engagement. The 0-3 rooms required further support from senior leaders to ensure staff felt confident and well guided. Staff shared that they sometimes felt unsure if they were "getting it right" and needed reassurance and leadership presence to prevent burnout. Despite these pressures, they continued to provide warm, nurturing care for children.

Self-evaluation processes were in place, and staff, children, and families contributed to the identification of some care and learning needs. These processes now need to be more consistently embedded across all playrooms. The service had begun using the new framework, but this would take time to fully integrate into everyday practice. This would support well-informed improvements.

Some improvements were well-paced and grounded in high quality, play-based learning. Staff training, such as forest kindergarten, eco work, and communication champions, was beginning to strengthen practice. The service now needed time to build on this and share learning across the whole team. Staff shared, "We have been impacted by a number of staff changes due to maternity leave, promotions and long-term absence. I believe in our capacity for improvement but we need to have a period of stability and consistency within the staff team to fully embed our approaches."

The service handbook and induction processes supported new staff to understand expectations, and mentoring helped them settle confidently into their roles. For example, a new staff member had settled well with support from her mentor.

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 a mix of high-quality spontaneous and planned play. Many activities were built on their interests, which supported curiosity, creativity and enjoyment. Outdoor play had improved, becoming tidier and more accessible, with the slide now open and used safely. Babies benefited from sensory experiences such as coloured spaghetti used as "sea sand," which promoted exploration. A parent told us, "Children are at the centre of every decision made within the centre. There appears to be a wide range of activities to suit each child and their individual interests."

To further strengthen practice, leaders needed to ensure deep engagement across all playrooms. Some rooms had richer resources than others, highlighting a need for more consistent and well distributed resources across the setting. For example, the baby room and the 3-5 room had a range of sensory baskets, puppets and open-ended materials that were not yet shared with the 2-3 room. This limits children's opportunities to explore, experiment and engage in high quality play. Staff shared they agreed there was a lack of resources to meet children's needs. A staff member told us, "There is a lack of resources available to challenge the children."

There were also occasions where children's play was stopped rather than supported. For example, a child rolling a car down the slide in the 2-3 room was told to stop because it was unsafe, rather than being guided to explore the idea safely. This showed a missed opportunity to balance risk, creativity and learning.

Planning was a mix of child-led and adult-led experiences, and staff responded to children's interests. Some staff celebrated achievements well and shared progress with families. However, assessments and observations were not consistently up to date. Staff explained that absences and reliance on supply staff made this difficult. Some children had recent observations, while others had not had any for some time. This meant staff did not always have a clear picture of each child's progress or next steps.

There were some opportunities for children to develop early language and numeracy skills through play. For example, a child building with blocks counted them and used words like "bigger" and "smaller." To improve, staff needed to provide more varied and meaningful literacy and numeracy experiences. Simple additions, such as measuring tapes, clipboards, story baskets, and more mark-making opportunities, would help deepen learning.

Outdoor play was very positive and offered children a wide range of exciting, high-quality experiences. Children across all playrooms enjoyed access to shaving foam play, an obstacle course, litter-picking, and water play, all supported by a rich selection of open-ended resources. Skilled staff interactions helped children stay engaged, curious and confident as they explored. Children climbed, ran and investigated their environment with enthusiasm, showing high levels of enjoyment and physical development. These opportunities helped children build resilience, develop coordination, and experience a strong sense of achievement outdoors.

The service was making the best use of its current outdoor space; however, additional funding would enable further development and enhancement, ensuring the environment continues to grow in quality and better supports children's play, learning and wellbeing.

Staff used effective questioning at times and supported children's thinking, especially during risky play outdoors. Some interactions showed skilled scaffolding that extended learning. However, there were also missed opportunities. For example, children drawing on paper received no adult interaction, and children rolling on the floor were neither engaged in conversation nor supported in developing their ideas. In contrast, the other staff showed stronger practice, with staff inviting children into play and extending their thinking.

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.

Staff provided warm, responsive care and supported children's wellbeing through consistent routines and nurturing interactions. Children appeared safe, settled and emotionally secure as a result. Personal plans were in place and were generally completed to a high standard, helping staff understand and meet individual needs.

A small number of plans required additional information to fully reflect children's circumstances. For example, significant changes in a child's home life had not yet been recorded. All other plans we sampled were well completed, but ensuring that every plan contained all essential details would strengthen continuity of care and support staff in responding appropriately to each child's needs.

Children were heard, respected and included in decisions about their play and care. Staff asked children what they wanted to play with and involved them in small choices throughout the day. Care routines, including nappy changing, were carried out with dignity and respect.

The service had also achieved its UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) Bronze Award, demonstrating a commitment to children's rights and participation. Continuing to embed rights-based practice across all rooms would further strengthen inclusion.

Children benefited from strong bonds with their key workers and core staff team. Families shared that communication was positive and that staff understood their children well. These secure relationships supported consistency between home and the setting. However, the high number of supply staff affected continuity. While core staff provided stability, some children experienced changes in the adults supporting them. A parent told us, "Always short staffed and it looks chaotic at times." Reducing reliance on temporary staff where possible would help maintain strong, predictable relationships.

Parents were welcomed warmly and respectfully and were encouraged to be involved in their child's experience. An open-door approach allowed families to access most playrooms and see their children at play. The only exception was the 2-3 room, where parents currently had no access. Reviewing this once children were settled and routines were established would help ensure consistency across the setting. Parents shared, "Friendly, caring, and compassionate staff. They have a lot of time for the children and go

above and beyond," and "The nursery is fab and I would recommend it to anyone. The staff are fab and very helpful."

Medication procedures were safe and well-managed. Records, permissions and training logs were up to date, and staff demonstrated a clear understanding of their responsibilities. This ensured safe administration and accountability.

Accident and incident records were completed clearly and accurately. Audits and follow-up actions were in place, showing a commitment to continuous improvement. For example, recent incidents had been reviewed promptly, and appropriate actions were taken.

Staff had a good understanding of safeguarding procedures and their roles in protecting children. Training was up to date, and staff spoke confidently about what they would do if they had a concern.

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

Leadership	4 - Good
Leadership and management of staff and resources	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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