Early learning and childcare (ELC) setting shared inspection report

Lime Tree Day Nursery

Glasgow City Council
3 March 2026

In December 2025, a team of inspectors from HMIE and the Care Inspectorate visited Lime Tree Day Nursery. During our visit, we talked to parents/carers and children and worked closely with the head of setting and staff.

Key inspection findings

- Children benefited from nurturing, caring staff who met their needs, supported them to have fun, feel safe, and valued.
- Children benefited from positive, unhurried, and nurturing mealtimes.
- The approach to personal planning should be strengthened to reflect children's changing needs.
- Staff were deployed well to meet individual children's needs.
- Children are motivated, enthusiastic learners. They benefit from improvements staff, children and parents make to the outdoor play areas.
- Staff recognise they need to develop further their use of systems to assess, record and share the progress children make in their learning.

HM Inspectors and the Care Inspectorate gathered evidence to enable us to evaluate the setting's work using four quality indicators from the Quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors.

Quality Indicator	Evaluation
Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment	good
Learning, teaching and assessment	satisfactory/adequate
Nurturing, care and support	good

Children's progress	satisfactory/adequate

Summary of inspection findings

Key contextual Information

Lime Tree Day Nursery offers early learning and childcare (ELC) for children from the age of 6 weeks until they start school. The nursery provides a variety of places on a full year or term time basis between the hours of 8 am and 6 pm. There are 133 children on the roll. The setting is registered for 91 children to attend at any one time. There are four main play spaces. All playrooms have access to outdoor spaces. The nursery is connected to Merrylee Primary School but has a separate entrance, laundry, staff room and office. A room at the back of the nursery is currently under development. The nursery has experienced significant periods of change of leadership, uncertainty and shortages of staffing. This has constrained improvements. Staff absence is now reducing. There is a permanent manager who is developing her senior leadership team. A temporary depute manager, two team leaders, a large team of full- and part-time child development officers and three support workers are aided by administrative and domestic staff.

Leadership:
Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

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 demonstrated a growing understanding of child development, evident through nurturing and supportive interactions. They were mindful of children's rights and used nurturing approaches. For example, we observed practice that strongly upheld children's right to play and gave children a voice in shaping their environment. This supported positive outcomes for children related to their wellbeing, physical development, and play.

Staff had access to a wide range of professional learning opportunities and completed training such as outdoor play and block play. Some staff had achieved or were working toward further qualifications to enhance practice. Management prioritised staff development through regular professional reviews and wellbeing sessions, helping staff plan learning that aligned with their individual needs and the nursery improvement plan. These strength-based meetings supported them to work towards shared goals of delivering consistent, high-quality outcomes for children and families.

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Staff and management came together to reflect on practice during in-service days and some team meetings. Due to staff absence, meetings had not taken place as often as the manager intended. When they did, staff reflected on practice, approaches, and changes made to support positive outcomes for children. This was at an early stage of supporting staff to have a voice, influence change, and measure its impact. We suggested the manager prioritise and agree an approach with staff to ensure regular team meetings and information sharing. This would strengthen self-evaluation, promote consistency, and ensure everyone works toward shared goals to further improve outcomes for children.

Staff were given opportunities to lead areas of interest, such as outdoor play and transitions, which had begun to make a positive impact on children's experiences and development. Outdoor spaces supported children's care, play, and learning well. We discussed with the manager how broadening and deepening these initiatives to support improvement of other aspects of practice, such as the documentation of children's play based learning. The manager agreed and should now work towards plans that use staff skills, training, knowledge, and experience to strengthen documentation of children's care, play, and learning and enhance both indoor and outdoor environments.

Overall, staff worked well as a team showing flexibility and ensuring all children's needs were met. The manager had been building team morale, and most staff reported this was improving. Despite previous changes in senior leadership and periods of absence, a permanent manager was in place, although some roles remained temporary. Absence had reduced, morale had improved, and the team were motivated and focused on delivering positive experiences for children and families.

Leaders, and staff recognised the importance of deploying staff appropriately to meet children's needs. This was particularly evident at busy times, such as mealtimes. Staff deployment was well planned to ensure children's needs were met while allowing staff time to rest and refresh. This supported continuity of care and a positive experience for children.

Children play and learn: Learning, teaching and assessment

Across the setting, there are warm and respectful relationships with children and between children. As a result, children feel safe, valued and secure and settle quickly within playrooms. Children access independently a wide range of play spaces and resources indoors and outdoors. The recently developed outdoor play areas, created in consultation with children and parents, motivate children well. Staff provide an increased level of choice and challenge which encourages children to explore, experiment and develop their curiosity and creativity. Staff should now ensure that all play spaces, particularly those indoors, provide appropriate challenge for all children. The team should continue to support all children to lead their own learning.

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This would ensure that children's interests are reflected more in playroom provision, enabling increased engagement in sustained periods of learning.

Almost all staff respond well to children and their care needs. The team know children and their families well. Staff establish consistent routines and create calm and purposeful learning environments. This supports children to concentrate and engage well in their play with or alongside others for most of their day. Across the setting, the majority of staff use sensitive commentary, well timed interventions and appropriate open-ended questioning with children as they play. The team's use of digital technology to enhance learning is at an early stage. Staff should improve the use of digital technology opportunities and experiences to support learning across the curriculum.

Staff record some observations about each child's progress using online learning profiles. These include photographs and descriptions of group and individual experiences. However, most observations do not yet fully capture children's skills, and do not yet support staff or parents to build upon children's achievements. Staff now need to improve how they identify and record these achievements, and plan for next steps. The team have started to provide parents with updates on children's progress during helpful parent meetings. Families share children's achievements from home and staff share information informally each day with parents. Most parents report that they would like to know more about their child's progress across learning.

Staff's skill in observing, identifying and recording significant assessment evidence of children's learning is not consistent across the setting. As a matter of priority, the team would benefit from continued support to ensure they make more accurate judgements about children's individual progress across all areas of the curriculum. This will help staff build on children's prior learning and plan for appropriate next steps. At present, children have limited access to their online learning profiles and would benefit from increased use and input to their profiles. Staff should better support children to reflect on their learning. Practitioners are at the early stage of involving parents to agree relevant, well-judged personalised next steps which broaden and deepen children's learning.

Senior leaders should continue to implement their clear action plan to develop further their implementation of systems to track and moderate children's learning across the curriculum. The manager has introduced meetings that show early positive signs of better supporting staff to begin to identify gaps in children's learning and development. Staff should now use this information to inform their new approach to planning learning for individuals and groups of learners. Staff need to ensure that experiences and spaces provide appropriate pace and challenge for all children.

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Children are supported to achieve: 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 approaches from staff, who knew them well and responded sensitively to their needs. Staff offered cuddles, reassurance, and a warm welcome, helping children feel safe and valued. Strong relationships fostered positive attachments that supported wellbeing and enabled children to have fun and feel respected.

Settling-in procedures were tailored to each child and family. Families spoke positively about the nurturing approach and clear communication during their child's transition into the setting, saying they felt welcomed and that the process met individual needs. Transition programmes supported children moving on to school, promoting wellbeing, and sharing of children's development and progress.

The environment offered natural, soft lighting and décor, creating a homely feel. We noted some outstanding maintenance tasks, such as broken finger guards on doorways and inadequate outdoor lighting. These had been reported, and the provider and manager reassured us that action would be taken promptly. Addressing these tasks will further enhance safety and send a strong message to children and families that their wellbeing and safety is a priority.

Personal plans were in place for all children, and staff worked with families to gather information on individual needs. When sampled, plans needed clearer next steps and strategies. They were not always updated when information changed or at least every six months. Although staff knew children well, plans did not consistently capture this, risking confusion. Better recording would strengthen practice (see area for improvement 1).

Mealtimes were a particular strength of the service. They were relaxed and nurturing. Staff and children sat together, creating a homely atmosphere. Rolling lunches allowed children to come to a natural pause in play and eat when hungry, supporting wellbeing and their right to play. Staff supervised and encouraged rich conversations. Children served their own food and drinks, building confidence and social skills. Staff were aware of allergies and preferences. Mealtimes promoted independence, rights, and positive relationships.

Staff built positive relationships with families, creating an inclusive ethos. Parents were welcomed in at drop-off and pick-up times, encouraging informal conversations. Engagement had improved through stay-and-play sessions, home links, and transition programmes. The service strengthened listening by responding to complaints and putting strategies in place to support children and family needs. We suggested more timely communication when concerns arise to show families

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their views are valued and support trusting relationships. The manager planned a parental space for events and collaboration, which we agreed could enhance engagement. These actions supported wellbeing, positive attachments, and a sense of community between home, nursery, and school.

Areas for improvement -

1. To support children's health, safety and wellbeing, the provider should ensure that each child has a personal plan which is reflective of their individual needs, next steps, and strategies to support them.

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 right for me because it sets out how my needs will be met, as well as my wishes and choices" (HSCS 1.15).

Children are supported to achieve: Children's progress

Children bring a wide range of skills and experiences as they engage in experiences. Overall, most children make satisfactory progress in most areas of their learning. The manager, working closely with officers from the local authority, has rightly identified that most children could make better progress. The team have a clear action plan to improve their use of systems that track and monitor children's learning. Most documentation does not yet reflect accurately the progress children make over time. Keyworkers now need to use their sound understanding of children's strengths, interests, and home circumstances to ensure they build more effectively on children's skills and prior learning. The team have begun to work well together to try out new ways to plan, document and share children's progress in learning. A few practitioners effectively document the specific progress individual children make in a few areas of their learning as a result of their experiences at nursery.

Almost all children make satisfactory progress in communication and early language, mathematics and health and wellbeing. Most children develop well their listening skills and love of books as they explore favourite stories and characters on their own or with staff. The majority of children increase their vocabulary appropriately during extended periods of imaginative play in the home corner. Older children enjoy the challenge of identifying and exploring the individual sounds within words as they clap with staff. The majority of children are keen communicators who mark make for a purpose as they write individual letters and signs. Most children are now ready to develop further their phonological awareness. Children need more challenging and motivating experiences where they can apply their early communication skills in real-life contexts.

Children develop well their understanding and language of volume, size and shape as they build structures for their outdoor area. They compare, estimate and measure as

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they help staff cut ropes. A few children are engrossed for extended periods of time as they transport, fill and empty containers in the sand and water areas. Almost all children use numbers and counting as they play or as they talk about their healthy snack. A few children cooperate very well together with one another and staff as they problem solve, compare shapes and discuss length in the construction area. Most children are now ready to explore a wider range of mathematical experiences, including opportunities to collect, analyse and display data and develop further their understanding of number and number processes.

Children develop their self-esteem, perseverance and gross motor skills well as they challenge themselves to navigate slopes, climb and transport materials in the outdoor area. Most children enjoy tasting a wide range of healthy fruits and vegetables at snack time. They are increasingly independent as they get ready for outdoor play or remind their friends of road safety rules as they walk to the bus stop. Almost all older children are ready to take on increased level of responsibility in everyday experiences. Most children are also now ready to develop further their understanding and use of the language of health and wellbeing.

The team gather, display and value what children achieve at home and outwith nursery. Staff notice, praise and celebrate what children do well and key milestones shared by parents. The team now need to work with children, parents and one another to identify what this tells staff about individual children's skills, strengths and needs. Staff do not yet use this information effectively to inform their planning of experiences or interactions with children.

The manager and staff know children and their families very well. Children who experience changes to their family circumstances and those with additional support needs are quickly identified. The team work very well with parents and visiting specialists to, for example, support children with specific sensory needs. Staff develop close, trusting relationships with families of children who may experience barriers to their learning. The management team do not yet record, collate and analyse robust data to inform their work to ensure equity for all children. The team need to continue to use their highly relevant professional learning to inform improvements to systems to track and monitor children's progress. This should support a more strategic approach to identifying children who would benefit from universal and targeted interventions.

Safeguarding (HMIE)

Inspectors discussed safeguarding and child protection information provided by the ELC setting with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the ELC setting and the education authority.

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Outcome of inspection

We are confident that the ELC setting has the capacity to continue to improve and so we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection.

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