

DAYCARE NURSERY *checklist*



PREPARE TO VISIT ONE OR TWO NURSERIES

This checklist is designed to help you think through the questions and considerations when selecting a nursery. We recommend visiting at least two so you can compare. Remember, your own first impressions are the most important. Is it a friendly, welcoming atmosphere? What do you see? Are the staff calm and organised? Do the children look happy and occupied? Does the nursery meet your expectations? Listen and look, but go with your instincts.

Ask local parents for nursery recommendations. Check Facebook and local groups; they'll know reputations and share positives or negatives about nurseries you're considering.

Here are 10 categories to consider:

THE STAFF

- Ask about staff turnover. Choose a nursery with strong staff benefits—good pay and solid employment packages help retain top staff. Low turnover is key to consistent, stable care for your child. Speak with staff at all levels, including management, about how long they've been there and how long the owner has run the nursery.
- What checks and cross-references are made before taking on new staff?
- If there are staff absences, do they have their own bank or use an agency?
- Managers must be childcare-qualified to SCQF 9; at least 50% of staff must have SCQF 7 childcare qualifications; at least one staff member must hold a First Aid Certificate. What percentage of staff are trained in first aid/CPR?
- Ask about child ratios. The guidelines require: 1:3 for 0-2 years, 1:5 for 2-3 years, 1:8 for 3-8 years. Do these ratios change outside the nursery building?
- Are staff happy, relaxed, well-presented, calm, and confident? How did they interact with your child during the visit?
- Do they have a full-time or part-time teacher? How is the preschool year prepared for school? Do they follow the Curriculum for Excellence?
- Do they have specialist staff (e.g., French, music, sports, art) or visiting specialists? If so, what are the costs?



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THE PREMISES & EQUIPMENT

- Is the equipment high-quality, clean, safe, and appropriate?
- Can children easily help themselves to toys they're interested in?
- Is the interior bright, clean, well-decorated, well-ventilated, warm and light? Is there access to fresh air and physical play? Do children have free-flow outdoor play, even in wet weather? Do you provide waterproofs and wellies? Do you apply sunscreen?
- What are the secure entry/exit procedures for parents, children, and visitors?
- Do walls feature plenty of children's own drawings/paintings, showing that creativity is valued?
- Where are naps taken, and what sleeping facilities are provided?

THE CHILDREN

- Look at the children in the nursery. Do they appear happy, stimulated, and well occupied?
- Are the children using a variety of activities? Are the staff involved in play?



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DAILY ROUTINES

- Expect activities such as painting, drawing, glueing and sticking, imaginative play with the sandpit, water table, or playhouse. Story time and reading, construction blocks and dough, jigsaws and puzzles, moving and dancing to music, singing, and simple cooking should all be included. How do they avoid gender stereotyping? How much outdoor time is provided each day, and when/where does this take place?
- Television and videos should play little or no part in what your child does at nursery. If videos are part of the curriculum, are they age-appropriate and educational? For three to five-year-olds, learning should be through play, exploration, and having fun. Ask how this happens in the nursery.
- Are outside trips, visits, activities, or classes provided? Is there an additional charge for these? How are they supervised?
- At what age, and how, are iPads and computers used to aid learning?
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NURSERY POLICIES

- Will the nursery tell you if your child is unhappy today, and how do they comfort them if they cry? Do staff have experience with attachment issues?
- What are settling-in procedures, and are free settling-in sessions available?
- What are policies on allergies, potty training, and discipline? How do staff stay aware of each child's medical needs?
- Are there policies for emergencies, injuries, and infectious illnesses?
- Which illnesses mean your child must stay home, and for how long? If your child is unwell, you may need time off work to care for them.
- Do they share your views on sleep, discipline, feeding, and other care issues? Do carers ask detailed questions about your child's health and care? How is challenging behaviour handled, and what counts as "bad" behaviour?
- Is there an open-door policy for drop-ins?
- How do they transition children between rooms and coordinate with feeder schools for a smooth P1 move?
- How are trips and park visits arranged, and how are children transported?

FOOD OPTIONS

- Are meals provided? Breakfast, Lunch and Tea? Are they included or extra on the tip of the fees?
- If provided, are they hot or cold, organic? Can I see the menu? Was it devised by an early-years nutrition specialist? What snacks and drinks are provided?
- What are the food preparation facilities like? If an external provider is used, how robust are their allergen management procedures?
- What provisions are made for vegetarians or children with allergies?
- What time are meals served? Do staff sit with the children during meals?
- Do they provide formula milk? Is it included in the fees? Will they store expressed breast milk and provide it on demand? Is there a space for breastfeeding when picking up?
- Do they encourage brushing teeth after lunch or snacks?



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COMMUNICATION

- What kind of daily report do parents receive (nappies, sleep, meals, activities)? Is it verbal or written?
- Is your child assigned a key worker you can talk to about daily matters and general progress?
- Do learning journals exist for viewing, possibly online? How often are they updated?

PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATIONS

- Is the nursery registered with the Care Inspectorate? The registration certificate should be displayed with a current insurance certificate.
- When was the last inspection by the Care Inspectorate or Education Scotland/HMIE? The report is online; ask them to email you a copy as well.
- Do they belong to a professional body (e.g., National Day Nurseries Association Scotland) to stay informed on regulations? Are they Montessori Accredited?
- Have they earned any awards? Eco-Schools Green Flag (Green, Bronze, or Silver); Beach or Forest School accreditation; Healthy Eating awards?

COSTS & EXTRAS

- How are fees collected? Is there flexible or hourly pricing, and a minimum number of sessions?
- Are holidays charged? Is there a part-time option or a discount for full-time?
- What's included in the fees (nappies, meals, milk, activities, outings) vs. extras?
- Do you participate in the 1,140 free hours for 3- to 4-year-olds? If yes, how are those hours delivered?
- What notice is required to leave?
- Do you accept childcare vouchers?
- Can you top up a part-time place with extra sessions?
- Are there discounts for students, low-income families, employers, or siblings?
- If you work and qualify for Working Tax Credit, could you get help with childcare costs?

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Was the atmosphere chaotic or calm, and what would suit your child best?
- Do opening times fit your schedule? You shouldn't have to drop off exactly at opening time.
- Are pick-up times flexible? Is there an after-school club for older children?
- Is there parking during busy times?
- What are the entry procedures? If there's a waiting list, how long is it?

