

Halkirk Playgroup Day Care of Children

Halkirk Primary School
Braul Terrace
Halkirk
KW12 6YN

Telephone: 01847 831 881

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
11 May 2022

Service provided by:
Halkirk Playgroup

Service provider number:
SP2003001795

Service no:
CS2003008609

About the service

Halkirk Playgroup is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of maximum of 30 children aged 3 years, to not yet of an age to attend primary school, at any one time.

Halkirk Playgroup is located within the school premises of Halkirk Primary School in Caithness. The premises consist of a large playroom with kitchen area, toilets and cloak room. The playgroup also has access to a large outdoor play area.

The play group is committee led and works in partnership with The Highland Council to provide funded early learning and childcare.

What people told us

We spoke with some of the children who were playing with their friends. They told us what their favourite things to do at playgroup were. Comments included:

"I like playing with the cars"

"I like playing with the dinosaurs"

"My favourite things is playing outside"

" I like the sand"

During the inspection, we were contacted two parents. They advised us that they were happy with the standard of care their children received. They identified some areas for improvement around children's choice and parental engagement.

Some comments included:

"My child is very happy in the playgroup setting and I feel staff are nurturing and responsive"

"(Child) has a lovely bond with the staff"

"Halkirk playgroup is very good and my child does like going. The only thing that I don't agree with, is their rule of the children in groups while inside. I feel like this really limits who the children can play with."

"In getting their folders home every term we can view our child's progress. I get pictures home every few weeks. Of course things are different due to Covid-19. But I really miss having in class interactions and face to face private meetings with the 'teachers'."

Self assessment

The playgroup had not been asked to complete a self-assessment in advance of the inspection. We reviewed the service's quality assurance systems and discussed the importance of these being developed and implemented to improve the experiences and outcomes for children attending the service. Further details can be found in the management and leadership section of the report.

From this inspection we graded this service as:

Quality of care and support	3 - Adequate
Quality of environment	3 - Adequate
Quality of staffing	2 - Weak
Quality of management and leadership	2 - Weak

Quality of care and support

Findings from the inspection

We evaluated this quality theme as adequate. While the strengths had a positive impact, key areas need to improve.

Children experienced warm, caring, and nurturing interactions from staff who supported their care needs. Staff got down to children's level and gave praise and encouragement as well as offering hugs and reassurance which contributed to children feeling safe and secure.

Personal plan information developed with parents, identified individual development, health and wellbeing needs. This supported staff to understand children's individual needs. However, they did not always use the information effectively to ensure the individual needs of all children were met. For example activities were not always differentiated to support all children to succeed. Staff on occasions missed cues that children needed additional support, particularly during the transition to lunch. As a result, not all children experienced learning and development opportunities that were relevant, personalised, or appropriate.

Adequate communication systems were in place for sharing information with parents. Daily communication was done verbally at drop off and collection and through virtual communication. This helped to maintain positive relationships and supported families to feel included. As national Covid-19 guidance is changing, we asked the manager to consider how opportunities for parental engagement can be further enhanced. This is in line with requests from parents who would like more opportunities to discuss how their children are developing and progressing.

Positive working relationships had been established with other agencies. This ensured the service had information on how to support children with identified additional support needs. Regular communication and consultation meant plans were being routinely reviewed with parents and relevant agencies. This was resulting in improved outcomes for some children.

We saw examples of children leading their play and learning experiences. During this time they were meaningfully engaged and engrossed in their play. However, this was not consistent throughout the

inspection. For a significant amount of time children were being directed to take part in adult led activities, which were not always age and stage appropriate for the children attending. Additionally, children were being managed and moved around the indoor environment in small groups, which restricted their choice around who they could play with and sit with at mealtimes. This negatively impacted children's play and learning experiences. **(See recommendation 1)**

Arrangements for snack and mealtimes, required improvement. Some experiences encouraged opportunities for children to be independent, for example children were able to pour their own milk and water at snack. Identified snack helpers were involved in serving food for their peers. There was a lack of flexibility in the delivery of snack and lunch provision. This meant there was insufficient time between children being served snack and having lunch. This was not responsive to individual needs. The lunchtime experience was disorganised and delivered in a task driven manner. This resulted in missed opportunities to support children who required help. At times staff were distracted and not alert to what was going on, consequently they were unable to effectively promote children's independence, language, and communication skills. **(See recommendation 2)**

Requirements

Number of requirements: 0

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 2

1. To enable children to receive high quality play, learning and development opportunities the manager should ensure staff support and respect children's choice and are responsive to their individual interests and needs.

This is in order 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 I choose, and freely access a wide range of experiences and resources for my age and stage, which stimulate my natural curiosity, learning and creativity.' (HSCS 2.27)

2. To support children's wellbeing, the provider must ensure that all children are supported to experience relaxed snack and mealtimes. This should include, but is not limited to, reviewing timings, staff deployment to support children and opportunities for children to be independent at mealtimes.

This is in order to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which states that 'I can enjoy unhurried snack and mealtimes in as relaxed an atmosphere as possible.' (HSCS 1.35)

Grade: 3 - adequate

Quality of environment

Findings from the inspection

We evaluated this quality theme as adequate. While the strengths had a positive impact, key areas need to improve.

Children's happiness and engagement in play increased when they were outside. The outdoor environment was sensitively structured to take account of children's age and stage of development. The play space reflected children's current interests with appropriate resources and materials. Effective use of open-ended materials provided children with opportunities to be creative and challenge their thinking. Physical energetic play was well supported to keep children active and healthy. Children had access to materials for mark making outdoors which supported them to develop skills in early literacy.

Whilst we recognised the positive environment and play experiences children received in the outdoor area, we identified areas for development and improvement in relation to the indoor environment. There were some open ended, natural resources inside that supported children to develop their skills in understanding, thinking, investigation and problem solving. However, there was still an over reliance on plastic play resources in the playrooms with few real resources. The service should continue to embed the use of open ended materials indoors to ensure children have access to the same play experiences both indoors and outdoors.

The staff and manager told us that they had removed a number of resources in the indoor environment, due to infection prevention and control measures, relating to Covid-19. However they had not reinstated them as national guidance had been updated. This resulted in gaps in children's play experiences indoors, particularly in relation to imaginative play. There was also a lack of cosy areas and homely touches. This meant the indoor environment was not warm and welcoming for children and did not consistently promote opportunities to support children's age and stage of development. **(See recommendation 1)**

The layout of the indoor environment, restricted children's choice and space to play. There were a number of tables in the room which were intrusive and limited where children could play. Children were also placed in groups and allocated a designated space to play with resources. This restricted their choice in play which negatively impacted their experiences. The staff and manager told us that this was currently being reviewed and children had freedom to play in all areas of the room however this was not observed during the inspection.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 0

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 1

1. To enable all children to be cared for in an appropriate environment that meets their needs and supports them to reach their full potential, the manager and staff should review the layout of the environment. This should include but is not limited to ensuring:

- a) all children experience an environment that is welcoming, well furnished, comfortable, and homely.
- b) appropriate play spaces are available with suitable resources and materials to effectively challenge children and reflect their current interests and curiosities both indoors and outdoors.
- c) children have meaningful choice in their play experiences.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which states that: 'If I experience care and support in a group, I experience a homely environment and can use a comfortable area with soft furnishings to relax.' (HSCS 5.6)

Grade: 3 - adequate

Quality of staffing

Findings from the inspection

We made an evaluation of weak for this quality theme. Whilst some strengths could be identified, these were compromised by significant weaknesses.

Children received consistent and stable care from a staff team who were friendly, outgoing, and worked well as a team. This fostered a warm atmosphere which contributed to children feeling comfortable and confident.

Staff displayed nurture and warmth when interacting with children and were responsive in their requests. They offered cuddles, reassurance and support which helped children to feel safe and secure. For example, children who were unsettled on arrival were offered cuddles and reassurance from staff until they were ready to go and play.

Recruitment procedures in the service compromised the welfare and safety of children. Staff were working in the service without appropriate references or protecting vulnerable groups checks being undertaken and in place. Effective risk assessments had not been implemented to support the decision to employ a member of staff without following safer recruitment practice. As a result children were placed at significant risk and were not safeguarded from harm. **(See requirement 1)**

Staff were task driven at times. This was particularly evident in the indoor environment and during busier times of the day. This resulted in missed opportunities to support children's wellbeing, creativity and curiosity. Which meant play and learning opportunities were not always being maximised to ensure children's individual development needs were effectively supported.

There was limited evidence of the impact of recent training. We identified gaps in professional knowledge and skills around child led play and developing high quality indoor environments. Staff were developing their understanding of responsive planning. However, they were not yet consistently using current child development theory, such as 'Realising the Ambition,' to support them in developing their childcare practice. As a result children did not consistently benefit from high quality play experiences that promoted their choice and independence. **(See recommendation 1)**

Requirements

Number of requirements: 1

1.
By 6 June 2022, the provider must ensure that children are safe and protected. In order to achieve this the provider must ensure that any employees are recruited in a safe manner in line with best practice and that

all relevant checks are carried out in a timeous manner.

This is to comply with regulation 9 fitness of employees of The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/210). (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011, SSI 2011/210.

This is in order to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards, which state that: 'I am confident that people who support me have been appropriately and safely recruited' (HSCS 4.24)

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 1

1. To support children's wellbeing, learning and development, the provider should ensure staff access training appropriate to their role, and apply their training in practice. This should include, but is not limited to training in child led play and promoting high quality indoor environments.

This is in order to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I have confidence in people because they are trained, competent and skilled.' (HSCS 3.14)

Grade: 2 - weak

Quality of management and leadership

Findings from the inspection

We made an evaluation of weak for this quality theme. Whilst some strengths could be identified, these were compromised by significant weaknesses.

Staff told us they felt well supported by the manager who provided informal opportunities for staff to discuss any stresses, anxieties or concerns they had. This meant staff felt supported in their role both personally and professionally. However effective formalised support and supervision arrangements were not in place. Individual support and supervision did not always focus on improving outcomes for children. We found that these could be further developed to include supportive feedback with identified actions. This would support staff to reflect and improve on their practice, to be clearer on their responsibilities and accountable to their role. The manager's annual appraisals had been conducted by a member of staff. This did not support critical reflection which resulted in improved quality of practice. **(See requirement 1)**

Robust quality assurance systems were not in place. For example there were no quality assurance processes in place around safer recruitment practice, which placed children at risk. The manager was not systematically and accurately reviewing practice to identify strengths and further areas for improvement within the setting. This resulted in significant gaps in service delivery which impacted negatively on the quality of experiences children received. Although some monitoring of learning profiles and the lunch experience had taken place, there was no evidence of how this had benefited children and any identified improvement from this. The ineffective quality assurance systems meant we identified poorer outcomes for children. **(See requirement 1)**

The service improvement plan identified priority areas for development however it was not being used effectively to support improvement in the quality of the service for children and families. A clearer focus on children's play experiences, learning and the progress they are making will enable the service to make further improvements. **(See requirement 1)**

There was limited impact of how self-evaluation processes were driving forward improvements. The service should now review their self-evaluation processes and put systems in place to meaningfully evaluate and measure progress. This would help support a shared vision to improvement planning and develop a culture of self-evaluation for improvement.

Team meetings provided time for staff to come together and reflect. We found that these reflections were not always resulting in improved experiences for children as there was not a clear focus on quality of experiences and outcomes. We have asked the manager to review the format of meetings to support this. For example, through more effective reflection and evaluation of best practice. This will support them in identifying what they do well for children in their care and will highlight areas for development across the service.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 1

1. By 15 September 2022, the provider must ensure improved outcomes for children and practice by implementing effective systems of quality assurance.

To do this the provider must, at a minimum, ensure:

- a) regular and effective support and supervision for all staff is implemented.
- b) staff are supported to develop their knowledge and understanding around self-evaluation processes and are involved in the systematic evaluation of their work and the work of the service.
- c) clear and effective plans are in place for maintaining and improving the service.
- d) the management team effectively monitors the work of each member of staff and the service as a whole.
- e) effective systems are in place to monitor each stage of recruitment processes.

This is to comply with the - Regulation 3 Principles and Regulation 15 (a) and (b) Staffing of The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/210). (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011, SSI 2011/210.

This is in order to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards, which state that: 'I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes.' (HSCS 4.19)

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 0

Grade: 2 - weak

What the service has done to meet any requirements we made at or since the last inspection

Previous requirements

There are no outstanding requirements.

What the service has done to meet any recommendations we made at or since the last inspection

Previous recommendations

There are no outstanding recommendations.

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.com.

Enforcement

No enforcement action has been taken against this care service since the last inspection.

Inspection and grading history

Date	Type	Gradings
21 Jun 2019	Announced (short notice)	<div>Care and support</div> <div>Environment</div> <div>Staffing</div> <div>Management and leadership</div> <div>5 - Very good</div> <div>Not assessed</div> <div>5 - Very good</div> <div>Not assessed</div>

Date	Type	Gradings	
23 Jun 2017	Unannounced	Care and support	5 - Very good
		Environment	5 - Very good
		Staffing	Not assessed
		Management and leadership	Not assessed
14 Sep 2015	Unannounced	Care and support	5 - Very good
		Environment	5 - Very good
		Staffing	5 - Very good
		Management and leadership	5 - Very good
26 Sep 2013	Unannounced	Care and support	5 - Very good
		Environment	5 - Very good
		Staffing	5 - Very good
		Management and leadership	5 - Very good
13 Jun 2012	Unannounced	Care and support	4 - Good
		Environment	4 - Good
		Staffing	4 - Good
		Management and leadership	4 - Good
26 Nov 2010	Announced	Care and support	5 - Very good
		Environment	Not assessed
		Staffing	Not assessed
		Management and leadership	Not assessed
2 Mar 2009	Unannounced	Care and support	4 - Good
		Environment	4 - Good
		Staffing	4 - Good
		Management and leadership	4 - Good

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