

Avoch Primary Early Learning and Child Care Day Care of Children

Avoch Primary School
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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
29 May 2023

Service provided by:
Highland Council

Service provider number:
SP2003001693

Service no:
CS2003017171

About the service

Avoch Primary Early Learning and Childcare is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 78 children at one time. Of those no more than 48 are aged three to those not yet attending primary school and no more than 30 are attending primary school. The service is operated by Highland Council.

The purpose built accommodation comprises of two large playrooms. One playroom includes a servery area and is also used for snack and lunches. Additional accommodation includes a kitchen, toilet provision, office, reception, cloakroom and a large enclosed outdoor area which wraps round the building.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced which took place on 24 and 25 May 2023. The inspection was carried out by two 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;
- reviewed feedback received from 14 families;
- reviewed feedback received from seven staff;
- spoke with nine staff and management;
- observed practice and daily life; and
- reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Staff had developed positive and supporting relationships with children which contributed to children feeling secure.
- Planning approaches were child centred, supporting children to follow their interests.
- Arrangements to keep children safe were not well considered which put children at risk of harm.
- Quality assurance processes were not effective in sustaining improvement, resulting in poorer outcomes for children.
- Staff deployment did not take into account the layout of the setting which meant that children did not always benefit from high quality experiences.

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?	3 - Adequate
How good is our setting?	2 - Weak
How good is our leadership?	2 - Weak
How good is our staff team?	2 - Weak

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

How good is our care, play and learning?

3 - Adequate

We evaluated this key question as adequate, where strengths only just outweighed weaknesses .

1.1 Nurturing Care and Support

On the whole, children experienced warm, caring and nurturing approaches from staff across nursery and breakfast club. Staff usually supported children to manage their emotions, offering comfort and reassurance when it was needed. Due to ineffective staff deployment, staff were not able to consistently provide the right support at the right time for all children. We have made a requirement for this under QI 4.3, Staff Deployment. Staff had developed positive and supportive relationships with children and their families. One parent told us, "Staff really make the effort to get to know the children." This supported children to feel valued and secure within the setting.

Effective use of personal planning information within the nursery supported staff to meet children's needs. Information was regularly updated with parents, including appropriate strategies detailing how to support individual children. Most staff were confident in using these strategies to help children to feel settled and enjoy their time in the setting. This meant that, overall, children attending nursery received the care and support that was right for them. Breakfast club had recently re-started, and staff planned to introduce personal planning for children attending.

Snack and mealtimes were relaxed and social experiences for children. There were several opportunities for children to develop their independence skills, for example, collecting their own dishes, self-selecting snack, pouring drinks, and selecting cutlery. Staff had worked hard to make mealtimes a more homely experience, with the addition of tablecloths and flowers enhancing this. All children had access to fresh drinking water and children, who were having packed lunch, were provided with plates. Staff were very focused on children and were aware of the risk of choking. For example, staff gently reminded children to finish eating before talking. They engaged in nurturing conversations with children which supported their overall wellbeing as well as their language and communication skills.

1.2 Play and Learning

Most children were engaged in play and having fun with their friends. They were able to move freely between areas and benefited from access to outdoor spaces and fresh air. They had fun running up and down hills, climbing, and riding wheeled toys. This contributed to the development of gross motor skills.

Some staff supported children's developing numeracy, language and literacy skills through their interactions and conversation. For example, staff used story, song and rhyme to develop children's language and literacy skills, using open-ended questioning, repeating words and giving children time to answer questions. Some staff supported children to learn key numeracy skills through their play, labelling and repeating new vocabulary around shape, position and measurement. However, on occasion, staff missed cues from children to join in with their play. This resulted in missed opportunities to support children to be actively and meaningfully involved in their play experiences.

Overall, resources within the playroom supported children's problem-solving skills, natural curiosity and imagination. Children were having fun playing in the home corner, using real kitchen utensils in their role play, promoting learning through real life experiences. Resources had been added to reflect the children's current interest of castles, and kings and queens, including books in the construction area and dressing up materials in the 'castle'. Children had also been developing their creative skills making bunting to decorate the playroom. However, we found that children would benefit from more engaging provocations, and adult support, to engage with loose parts, both in the playrooms and in the outside area.

Planning approaches were child centred and followed children's interests. Children's words, pictures and ideas were captured within floor books which demonstrated their involvement in the planning process. The management team had recently implemented a new approach to profiling children's learning. Staff commented this was working well but that it was still in the early stages of development. The quality of observations was not yet consistent, which made it difficult for staff to track and monitor children's progress. The service had identified the need to develop the quality and consistency of observations to ensure children's play and learning is effectively planned for and children are sufficiently challenged at an appropriate level (see area for improvement 1).

Areas for improvement

1. To support children to achieve, the provider should, at a minimum:

- a) improve the approach and skills of staff in relation to tracking and monitoring children's progress; and
- b) support staff to develop their understanding of how to effectively observe and assess children's learning in order to plan quality learning experiences and meaningful next steps.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state:

'I am supported to achieve my potential in education and employment if this is right for me.' (HSCS 1.27).

How good is our setting?

2 - Weak

We made an evaluation of weak for this key question. Whilst we identified some strengths, these were compromised by significant weaknesses.

The setting was warm and welcoming with plenty of natural light which promoted a calm atmosphere. Children had free flow access to the outside garden from both playrooms which supported them to choose where they wanted to play and benefitted their overall wellbeing.

Staff had worked with children and families to increase the homely feel of the playrooms, introducing more real-life items and soft furnishings. Children had access to several cosy spaces where they could rest and relax and enjoy quieter activities such as reading. This contributed to children feeling respected and valued.

Children's health and wellbeing was not consistently supported by effective handwashing routines. Staff did not effectively monitor children's handwashing, which meant that children were not consistently practicing good hand hygiene and were not supported to develop this. Children were potentially at an increased risk of infection as routines were not fully established for handwashing after toileting, outdoor play and before and after eating.

Storage of children's personal information did not always follow best practice guidance. Confidential information was stored where parents could easily access it. We highlighted this during the inspection and staff took immediate action to address this.

Arrangements for security within the setting were not well considered. As children arrived and left, staff adjusted the total number of children present. However, we had significant concerns that children were able to exit the setting unobserved through the entrance door. This had been highlighted to the provider by the manager, but had not been adequately addressed. The management team had put in place measures to reduce the potential of children coming to harm, such as a member of staff always being present in the cloakroom. However, this was not always effective and as a result, children were placed at a significant risk of harm. This also had a negative impact on children's experiences as staffing was reduced elsewhere in the setting. We discussed this with the manager during inspection, as a result, action was taken by the provider to rectify the security of the main entrance. The service should continue to monitor this to ensure it is effective in ensuring children are unable to leave the service unattended.

How good is our leadership?

2 - Weak

We made an evaluation of weak for this key question. Whilst we identified some strengths, these were compromised by significant weaknesses.

The setting's vision, values and aims had been shared with families, who were encouraged to make comment and contribute. Parental engagement was being developed through stay and play visits, welcoming parents back into the setting at drop off and pick up times and sharing policies. Subsequently, parents were aware of what they could expect for their children from the setting.

The management team had a positive approach to improvement. They had used feedback from the previous Care Inspectorate inspection, other professionals, and parents to develop a focused improvement plan. Significant improvements had been made to the indoor environment and mealtime experiences for children. Children's views had been considered when making improvements to the indoor environment, contributing to children having a voice in the design of the setting.

Quality assurance systems and processes were not yet having a consistently positive impact. Staff deployment had been addressed at the last inspection, with significant improvements being made. However, this had not been sustained, we have made a requirement for this under 4.3, Staff Deployment. Although some quality assurance systems had brought about positive change, there were gaps, such as staff deployment and children's experiences, which had resulted in inconsistencies in practice not being identified, resulting in poorer outcomes for children. Additionally, where serious concerns were identified, the provider did not address these, which had put children at risk of harm (see requirement 1).

Staff were evaluating their practice against current guidance, such as "A quality Framework for day care of children, childminding and school-aged children" and "How good is our Early Learning and Childcare". This was supporting them to identify next steps, such as developing the outdoor environment to increase children's engagement, and increasing opportunities for parental engagement. They were beginning to evaluate the impact of changes made to children's outcomes. The management team should continue to support staff to develop their understanding of self-evaluation, to support a cycle of continuous improvement.

Requirements

1. By 6 October 2023, to improve outcomes for children and ensure they are safe, the provider must develop and implement an effective system of quality assurance to monitor and improve practice. To do this, the provider must, at a minimum:

- a) carry out effective monitoring including staff practice, quality of children's experiences and children's safety within the service; and
- b) implement effective action planning to address areas of required improvements within identified timescales

This is to comply with the Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011/210 - Regulation 3 Principles.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes.' (HSCS 4.19).

How good is our staff team?

2 - Weak

We made an evaluation of weak for this key question. Whilst we identified some strengths, these were compromised by significant weaknesses.

Staff were caring and nurturing in their interactions with children. Most staff knew children well and knew how to support them with their individual needs. Parents commented "The staff are all so caring and welcoming." and "The staff are really friendly and good with the children." As a result, children felt at ease in the setting.

Staff deployment was not effective. Consideration had not been given to the balance of skills, knowledge and understanding throughout the setting when temporary staff were being used. Temporary staff were supervising a large number of children in one of the outdoor spaces, with limited support from other staff members. There was inconsistent communication between team members in other outdoor areas which resulted in frequent periods of time where children were not adequately supervised. This put children's safety and wellbeing at risk.

Staff did not always recognise where they would be best placed to support children, for example, when children moved to another area of the setting. The awkward layout of the setting had not been considered in the deployment of staff required to effectively and consistently meet children's needs. Staff told us they felt they could not always meet children's needs due to the layout of the setting, and these concerns had been increased by the security issue at the main entrance. Concerns over security at the main entrance meant that one member of staff had to stay in cloakroom to ensure children were safe, reducing the number of staff throughout the rest of the setting. Some parents also expressed concerns about staffing levels, commenting "They are spread too thin." and "Staffing must be difficult as spread over several rooms / outside areas". As a result, children did not consistently receive high quality experiences (see requirement 1).

Processes had been put in place to support temporary staff, however these were ineffective. Temporary staff did not demonstrate a sufficient understanding of individual children's needs to be able to support them. This had the potential for children receiving inconsistent care. We discussed ways to support new and temporary staff, such as allocating them with a mentor from the existing staff team.

Requirements

1. By 6 October 2023, the provider must ensure children are safe and effectively supervised at all times. To do this, the provider must, at a minimum ensure:

- a) sufficient numbers of staff are deployed within the nursery as is appropriate to effectively and consistently meet the health, wellbeing, welfare and safety of children; and
- b) staff are deployed effectively to ensure children are appropriately supervised and kept safe at all times.

This is to comply with Regulations 4(1)(a) and 15(a) of the Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/210) (Requirements for Care Services)

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'My needs are met by the right number of people.' (HSCS 3.15).

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

To support children's wellbeing, the provider, manager and staff should review and improve the mealtime experiences. This should include, but not limited to:

- promoting opportunities for developing children's independence and language skills;

- reviewing staff deployment and practice to support children during snack and mealtimes; and
- staff providing effective and individualised care and support where appropriate to children during mealtimes.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state that:

'I can enjoy unhurried snack and mealtimes in as relaxed an atmosphere as possible.' (HSCS 1.35).

This area for improvement was made on 7 June 2022.

Action taken since then

Improvements to snack and mealtimes impacted positively on children's wellbeing. Children were encouraged to participate in these daily routines which provided them with opportunities to be responsible and develop life long skills. For example, children had more opportunities to develop their independence skills, such as collecting their own meal and selecting the correct cutlery. Staff sat with children during mealtimes which promoted close attachments, ensured effective supervision and supported early language and communication skills. This area for improvement has been met

Previous area for improvement 2

To enable all children to access a warm and welcoming environment, the manager and staff should review and develop the environment to make it more interesting, nurturing and homely. This should include, but is not limited to, creating a comfortable area with soft furnishings where children can rest and relax.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state that:

'My environment is relaxed, welcoming, peaceful and free from avoidable and intrusive noise and smell.' (HSCS 5.20).

This area for improvement was made on 7 June 2022.

Action taken since then

Children were cared for in an environment which was warm and welcoming. Staff had reviewed the room layout and had introduced homely touches and created spaces for children to rest and relax in. This enabled children to seek out a calm area where they could have some individual time if needed and enjoy quieter activities. 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?	3 - Adequate
1.1 Nurturing care and support	4 - Good
1.3 Play and learning	3 - Adequate
How good is our setting?	2 - Weak
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	2 - Weak
How good is our leadership?	2 - Weak
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	2 - Weak
How good is our staff team?	2 - Weak
4.3 Staff deployment	2 - Weak

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