

Hazlehead Park Outdoor Nursery Day Care of Children

The Grove
Hazlehead Park
Aberdeen
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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

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Service provided by:
Aberdeen City Council

Service provider number:
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Service no:
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About the service

Hazlehead Park Outdoor Nursery is registered to provide a fully outdoor day care of children service to a maximum of 40 children from aged three years to those not yet attending primary school at any one time.

The nursery is located within the residential area of Hazlehead in Aberdeen, close to the city centre. It is situated close to Hazlehead Park but is not within the park grounds. It is accessible by public transport and there is a car park available at the front of the nursery base. Children spend their time in the outdoor space at the nursery base and within forest areas nearby. The base is used for toileting and personal care and can be used during adverse weather conditions.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 29 and 30 August 2023. Two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate carried out the inspection. To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included previous registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered throughout the inspection year.

To inform our evaluation we:

- Spoke to children during their play
- Spoke with parent/carers
- Spoke with the staff and the management team
- Observed practice and experiences for children
- Reviewed documentation.

Key messages

- Children were well supported by nurturing and caring staff who were responsive to their individual needs.
- Children benefitted from a rich outdoor environment covering several different locations which provided them with very positive and varied experiences. The environment was very well thought out to provide exciting and stimulating spaces for play and learning.
- Being outdoors surrounded by nature, access to fresh air and limited barriers to sensory overload helped to create a calm environment.
- Children and families were very meaningfully involved and influenced change within the setting. The team valued feedback from families and had used this to make further improvements to the service.
- Staff worked hard to ensure children received consistently high quality learning opportunities which followed children's interests and deepened their knowledge.
- Children benefitted from a motivated and committed staff team who demonstrated high quality engagement with children at all times.

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?	5 - Very Good
How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good

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

How good is our care, play and learning?

5 - Very Good

We evaluated this key question as very good where there were significant strengths which supported positive outcomes for children.

1.1 Nurturing care and support

Children were nurtured by caring staff who greeted them warmly and were very engaged in their interactions with them. Parents and carers we spoke with commented upon how warm and friendly staff were. They told us how staff had worked hard to gain their children's trust which supported them to settle successfully.

Staff took care to ensure that children's privacy and dignity was respected at all times. We saw staff support some children with toilet training using a caring and positive approach.

Being outdoors surrounded by nature, access to fresh air and limited barriers to sensory overload helped to create a calm environment. This had a very positive effect on children's emotional regulation. Children were happy, settled, relaxed and engaged. This included children who were at the very start of their nursery journey and were in the service for short settling in sessions.

The staff knew the children really well. They were able to talk to us about specific needs and how these were supported. We saw children being very well supported, with approaches used fully centred around what the child needed.

Personal plans, containing good quality information about children's individual needs and how they would be met were in place. The personal plan format had recently been reviewed and updated to include suggested improvements from various relevant professionals.

Health care plans were in place for children who had a health need, such as food intolerances, allergies and asthma. Key information was in place to support staff and the information was easy to follow. Not all health care plans noted what action should be taken in an emergency. This was fed back to the manager and the plans were updated prior to the inspection being concluded. Children's medication was very organised and stored using a clear system which meant it was easily transported to whichever site children were playing in.

Children had access to water bottles at all times to support them to stay adequately hydrated. They enjoyed a positive and relaxed lunchtime experience outdoors sitting on logs. Children and staff sat together which helped to keep children safe and supported a sociable atmosphere. Children were able to return straight to a full range of play options once they had finished their packed lunch. There were some opportunities for them to develop their independence skills including pouring drinks and tidying away their dishes. Children had a lovely experience toasting their own bread for snack around the campfire. The team had been exploring and introducing different ways of providing opportunities for children to develop their independence skills including, for example, making their own sandwiches once a week.

Meaningful conversations took place throughout the day to support children to keep themselves safe. For example, reminding children of the safe route around the campfire and the importance of sitting whilst eating. When a child was throwing stones they were reminded about how this could hurt someone or

damage something. The staff member explored with them what else they could throw instead, such as bean bags or hoops. This was undertaken in a thoughtful and supportive way recognising the child's needs.

1.3 Play and learning

The children had lots of fun and joy at the nursery with much smiling, giggling and laughter evident throughout the inspection. The staff team were very much focused on children's right to play and there were no restrictions on this. Opportunities to engage in meaningful and fun play were available at all times including at, for example, at the very end of the day and immediately before and after lunch.

Very high quality play and learning experiences were consistently supported really well by staff throughout the day. These were very much child led. We saw, for example lots of imaginative play, climbing trees with appropriate encouragement and support and children exploring and making things with loose parts. Children were fully engaged in the experiences they were having. A parent told us, "the outdoor setting is perfect for our young learner and he has been exposed to some brilliant learning opportunities as a result."

Children had shown an interest in bees and staff supported them to extend this interest. This included having a visit from a bee keeper, being able to explore an uninhabited hive and seeing bees up close. The children were able to look at and touch bees wax and try some honey as part of snack. Having listened to a story about bees there was a concern from the children that perhaps there was not enough flowers around the nursery for bees to feed from. The children decided to make a bee garden and took full control of the planning and delivery of this.

The children had been fully involved in growing a range of foods including vegetables, such as potatoes, rhubarb, cucumbers and artichoke and herbs including mint, rosemary, thyme and sage. One of the children told us about a sale the children had put together to sell their produce to parents and carers. This helped to develop children's confidence and give them a sense of achievement as well as supporting their learning.

Literacy was well supported. Books were available and attractively presented both at the base and in the forest. We saw some engaging individual story times and sharing of books about animals and bugs which prompted further discussion. Cookery and food magazine and recipe books were included within the mud kitchen.

Numeracy was also well supported through staff making use of natural opportunities throughout the day. Children had, for example participated in counting who was in the line for going to the forest. They had thought about prices for the fast food shop they had put together in their imaginative play. They had sold some of the food they had grown at a recent sale. The team had recently done some work in relation to supporting the children with both literacy and numeracy and how they could extend it further. We could see that this was having a positive impact on staff practice.

How good is our setting?

5 - Very Good

We evaluated this key question as very good where there were significant strengths which supported positive outcomes for children.

2.2 Children experience high quality facilities

A very welcoming environment had been created. The children had created a lovely garden for bees at the

front entrance to the nursery. Helpful information and attractively presented artwork was displayed on the windows for families to see and recognise their children's achievements.

Homely, cosier spaces had been created within the outdoor space including a covered area for story telling and quiet time, a wooden tee pee and a hammock between the trees. Mattresses, cushions and blankets suitable for outdoors were available should children want to have a nap.

The outdoor space was very well thought out and had been developed with the children's full involvement. The children decided, for example that they wanted a mud kitchen, where it should go and participated in the development of it. There were spaces to create, a stage area to perform, water play, a large sand pit which was very well used by the children, painting and a climbing frame which again was very popular and built with full involvement of the children. A parent told us, "It's a very exciting and inspiring space."

Comprehensive risk assessments were in place for relevant activities including woodwork and the campfire. These highlighted the benefits for the children and what needed to be in place when supporting children with these activities to reduce risk. Having observed children at the woods toasting bread on the campfire and climbing trees it was clear that they were regularly reminded of their personal safety and staff ensured a safe environment.

A sheltered outdoor coat peg area helped to support children's independence and it provided a space for families to stop and chat to each other. This along with high levels of engagement from staff was really valued by families. One parent told us that families were "all nurtured by the nursery."

Very organised and efficient systems were in place to support groups that were going off to the woods. We observed staff and children setting off on their adventure very smoothly and well prepared. Having accompanied them to the woods we found that staff had set up the site earlier. It was a very inviting space for positive play and learning experiences. Appropriate resources were also in place for eating and drinking, toileting and handwashing.

There was some limited indoor space available for use when the weather was particularly poor or hot. It was also a welcoming space. Staff fed back to us that they felt that there was a need for a fixed and more robust outdoor shelter to ensure children could continue to have a range of high quality outdoor experiences when the weather was particularly poor. Funding for a poly tunnel had been agreed and was planned to be erected and available to use soon.

Infection control practice followed best practice. The children were very good at ensuring that they cleaned their hands thoroughly and staff modelled handwashing very well to those children who needed more guidance and support.

How good is our leadership?

5 - Very Good

We evaluated this key question as very good where there were significant strengths which supported positive outcomes for children.

3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well

Children and families were very meaningfully involved and influenced change within the setting. Creative ways were used to encourage feedback from families and this was much valued and acted upon by the team. For example, a question was written on one of the windows asking for feedback about a key area and

families were invited to write on the windows with special glass pens. We were able to see that feedback from this resulted in a change to how children accessed nursery outdoor clothing and were now able to take these home. One method used to engage children was asking them to place a wooden heart in their favourite area of the nursery. Areas which did not collect many hearts were then discussed with children along with what they would like to have there instead. This process resulted in a little used area of the outdoor space being changed into a large sand pit area which was very much enjoyed by a number of children.

When the setting first opened the outdoor space was empty and the children were very involved in decisions about how to use the space and were actively involved in setting it up. They participated in, for example, transporting bark to the mud kitchen area using wheelbarrows and being creative in how to use large loose parts to create a climbing frame. Where a parent had some reservations about their child attending sessions in the woods staff spent time with the parent showing them the woods and letting them see the children engaging in different activities there. This had a really positive impact and so the team decided that an opportunity to visit the woods should be built into the family induction sessions they held. Parents and carers we spoke with felt very involved in the service and valued the sense of community the team had created.

The team were using the resource 'How Good Is Our Early Learning and Childcare' to self-evaluate the nursery and support them to continually develop. Areas to focus on were identified around what was going on for the children at the time. For example, prior to summer the focus was on how the staff were supporting transitions as a number of children were moving on to primary school. All the team, parents and carers and children were encouraged to participate in this process through a variety of different methods. The service was very good at reflecting on their practice, considering feedback provided and taking action to further improve outcomes for the children.

A quality assurance journey e-book had been developed for the service which beautifully showcased the services improvement journey since registration. Photographs helped to tell the story and showed meaningful experiences for the children. The e-book showed how the space had dramatically evolved over time with very clear involvement of the children who very much shaped the outdoor space with the staff team.

An effective outcome focused improvement plan was in place for the nursery which had been informed by the self-evaluation process involving leaders, staff and families. We could see that actions had been taken to respond to the areas identified to be progressed, for example in relation to developing team relationships. This was done in a productive and supportive way leading to staff feeling "very energised" and "refreshed." These improvements had supported the nursery to continue to build on the very positive experiences for children.

How good is our staff team?

5 - Very Good

We evaluated this key question as very good where there were significant strengths which supported positive outcomes for children.

4.3 Staff deployment

A highly skilled and motivated staff team was in place which supported very good outcomes for the children. Staff were encouraged to develop their leadership skills, for example undertaking training in outdoor play and using the learning to lead the sessions and support other team members development. Some staff had

a lot of experience in early learning and childcare and some were newer to the role. They were however all really driven and worked hard to develop their knowledge, skills and confidence.

High levels of interaction were seen throughout the day which supported consistent very positive outcomes for the children. Staff were enthusiastic, happy and engaged which helped to foster a very positive atmosphere.

The service was very well staffed, taking account of the need for higher ratios due to spending time at various outdoor sites. Staff breaks were carefully considered to ensure that children were always well supported, with staff being very clear about the break schedule. Key busy times of the day including lunch time, drop off and pick up were appropriately staffed. This ensured that children's needs were consistently met. It also ensured that parents and carers were able to develop their relationships with staff and receive quality feedback about their child's nursery experiences. A parent told us that, "there are always plenty of staff around making it really easy to speak to someone if I need to." And another parent told us, "they are great at communicating and chatting about the day too." Staff were reminded of the importance of taking their breaks to support their wellbeing.

Arrangements for the day were very well organised. All staff knew what their roles and responsibilities were, for example which staff and children were going out to the forest, who was responsible for organising and supporting snack and lunch and who was showing new families around the setting.

Staff communicated very well together throughout the sessions. Use of walkie talkies when staff were at the forest to ensure that they could make contact. Staff were regularly checking in with each other re what they were doing next, doing head counts, changing the numbers on the board when children left or arrived to keep children safe.

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?	5 - Very Good
1.1 Nurturing care and support	5 - Very Good
1.3 Play and learning	5 - Very Good

How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	5 - Very Good

How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	5 - Very Good

How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good
4.3 Staff deployment	5 - Very Good

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