

Wellie Boots Child Minding

Huntly

Type of inspection:

Unannounced

Completed on:

17 October 2023

Service provided by:

Sharon and Peter Stoneman a
partnership Sharon and Peter
Stoneman a partnership

Service provider number:

SP2011983150

Service no:

CS2011305296

About the service

Sharon and Peter Stoneman provide a childminding service from their home, which is a terraced house within a rural village in Aberdeenshire. The service is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of nine children under the age of 16 years, of whom no more than eight are under 12 years and of whom no more than six are not yet attending primary school and no more than two are under 12 months. Numbers are inclusive of children of the childminders' family.

The service is close to the local school, parks and other amenities. The children are cared for in a designated playroom, and have access to the family kitchen, a bathroom and a fully enclosed garden at the rear of the house. Children make use of the dining kitchen to help the childminder prepare food and other activities that promote life skills.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 13 October 2023 between 09:30 and 13:30. The inspection was carried out by one inspector 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 both childminders at the service;
- Spoke with children during their play;
- Gathered feedback about the service from families;
- Observed practice and children's experiences;
- Reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Children were empowered to lead their own play and learning, and the child-led ethos was a major strength of the service.
- Children were supported to feel safe, loved and secure as both childminders had developed strong, nurturing relationships with them and caring relationships with their parents.
- Meaningful and regular communications with families ensured that children's individual needs were exceptionally well supported and respected.
- Daily, high-quality opportunities to play outdoors, either in the garden or in the local community, promoted children's health and wellbeing.
- The childminder had developed very robust ways of evaluating the service and identifying areas for development, which led to improved outcomes for children.
- Both childminders were extremely committed to professional development and demonstrated how this led to exceptional outcomes for children.

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?	6 - Excellent
How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
How good is our staff team?	6 - Excellent

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

How good is our care, play and learning?

6 - Excellent

We evaluated this key question as excellent where performance was sector leading with outstandingly high outcomes for children.

Quality Indicator 1.1 Nurturing care and support

Children attending the service were extremely happy, settled and comfortable. The childminders had formed very strong, nurturing bonds with each of the children in their care and this promoted their emotional security. For example, the childminder listened carefully to the children when she invited them to help plan the day ahead, gently reminding them of what they had done the previous day and supporting them with options. With the plan for the day agreed, the childminder followed the children's lead as they played in the main playroom, and later when they went out into the community.'

Children attending the setting were settled and comfortable. They had benefited from extended settling visits before starting at the service. This ensured they felt safe and secure in the childminders care. Parents agreed and one said, "They have been incredible with my child. The regular updates during their first week really helped me to feel less anxious about them being there". All parents strongly agreed that the childminder was nurturing and responsive to their child's needs, with one sharing, "Absolutely unparalleled level of care in this setting - I couldn't be more happy with the standard of nurture and care provided here". Another parent told us, "The level of nurturing the children receive is second to none". We agreed that the childminder consistently offered excellent care and support for children.

At all times, the childminders gave care and support that was in line with parents' preferences. The childminder communicated frequently with families to ensure that personal plans were up to date. This ensured that children's needs and rights were always at the centre of the personal planning process. Personal plans contained a high level of detail, including information about each child's wider family. The childminder used the wellbeing indicators (safe, healthy, active, nurtured, achieving, respected, responsible and included) to record how children's individual needs should be supported to ensure the best outcomes for them. This enabled the service to offer continuity of care and meant that they could respond quickly and sensitively to any changes in a child's life. One parent told us that the service, "Put the needs of all young children at the forefront of what they do", and explained how the service go above and beyond to extend this philosophy. They told us that the childminder had been very involved in their child's transition to primary school, saying, "Communication with the school has been phenomenal, often outside of normal working hours. Thank you Wellie Boots". This meant that children were getting the support they needed to reach their full potential.

Children's privacy and dignity was respected during personal care routine. Interactions such as singing during nappy changing nurtured children's security and confidence. Mealtimes were sociable experiences with everyone sitting round the kitchen table. Children were supported to wash their hands before and after meals. Older children were encouraged to spread their own toast and select their own vegetable snacks. The childminder had gathered children's views on mealtimes and as a result they were involved each week in compiling a shopping list for the next week. Children helped to tidy the table after meals and wipe the table down. Involving the children in the overall mealtime experience helped to foster children's choice and confidence. All meals were home cooked and offered a balanced diet. Parents valued the service's approach to mealtimes, with one sharing, "[They are] having to learn about tidying up toys before mealtimes which are great transferable skills for home".

Children's safety and wellbeing were supported through sensitive arrangements for sleep routines. The assistant childminder supervised sleeping children to keep them safe. Routines were agreed with parents and therefore were reflective of family wishes. A detailed sleep policy gave further reassurance to families that the childminder's approach which was based on the understanding the importance of sleep in children's overall development. A parent confirmed this, telling us that the childminders, "Always make sure child can have a nap if they need it".

Quality Indicator 1.3 Play and learning

Children were having fun as they led their own play, both indoors and outdoors. They experienced high quality learning opportunities throughout the day. For example, as children played with natural materials that they had gathered on a previous walk, the childminder very skilfully supported them to use all their senses, introducing rich vocabulary as they did so. They linked the materials to the changing season and encouraged them to imagine what else they would see, feel and hear when they went outside again. This helped to enrich their play and learning and in particular, helped to develop skills in language. When the children prepared for a walk in the community, they took the same collecting bag with them so they could add to their collection, giving them a sense of purpose and excitement.

Children continued to be deeply engaged in their learning as they went outside. The childminder's creative approach to child-led learning was exemplified when one child discovered a number of tree stumps and set out to step on them all. Their learning in numeracy was naturally extended to counting and measure as they joyfully discovered how many feet could fit on each stump. The childminder told us that they spent time in the outdoors every day, which helped the children to make strong connections with their community. They also regularly visited the school, library and coffee mornings, making full use of the wider community. Parents saw this in a positive light, sharing with us, "Outstanding service, [the childminders] are always looking for new activities and the children spend lots of time outside". Children excitedly pointed out the nearby hill that they could see from every part of the village including the childminder's garden; the childminder explained that they had purposely pointed this out every time they went outside. These experiences helped children to be connected to their local community and feel a sense of belonging.

Parents strongly agreed that the range of activities and experiences on offer were exceptional. One parent told us, "I am constantly amazed by the variety of experiences the children get at Wellie Boots. From the childminder playing guitar at music time, to going to the park, to choosing their own stories, baking and being involved in everything". Children also told us that they enjoyed regular song times with the guitar, as well as story times where they were invited to share books from home as well as from the well-stocked bookshelf in the playroom. These opportunities for creative experiences and choice helped to support the overall wellbeing of children.

Child-led planning was another major strength of the service. A floor book captured children's interests and ideas on how to develop these. We saw that the children had wanted to create art based on an autumn theme and this had been planned for, with very evident links to the children's continuing interests in leaves and conkers. Parents strongly agreed that children's play and learning was exceptionally well supported, with one commenting, "Their knowledge of child development, creating secure attachments, prioritising child-led activities and play is incredible and far beyond what I've found is offered from other settings. They are gentle, informed and passionate about childcare". We agreed that the childminder's knowledge of child development was very skilfully used to provide consistently high-quality play and learning experiences.

The childminder shared detailed observations on each child's play and learning with families through private digital media platforms. Children's comments were added there, and parents also had an opportunity to

share their views. The childminders gave warm praise for achievements and shared careful assessments of progress. Next steps for learning were recorded in each child's learning journey within their personal plan file. These were readily available in the playroom and were regularly shared with families. This ensured that plans were appropriate to children's needs and gave opportunities for any additional supports to be identified and planned for.

How good is our setting?

5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

Children experienced a warm, friendly and homely environment which supported their emotional wellbeing. A dedicated playroom had been created which had plenty natural light and plenty space for children to move about and play. Children's artwork was displayed in the room and children were enabled to choose the resources and activities they wanted, giving them the message that their wants, needs and achievements mattered. A comfortable sofa was available for quiet time or rest, and the playroom was also used for naps. Travel cots and individual sets of bedding were used for this, ensuring that children were kept safe and secure.

The playroom contained a wide range of resources that could be easily accessed by children. For example, baskets with stacking blocks were placed on the floor for younger children to discover, and a tuff tray was used to lay out and explore natural materials. This had the benefit of keeping smaller items safely out of reach of the youngest children. Parents agreed that their children always had access to a variety of play items and spaces, with one commenting that they liked, "Circulation of toys, getting new ones in and putting old ones away to keep children interested". We discussed with the childminder the benefits of phasing out plastic toys and replacing them with more natural, open-ended resources which would have more potential to spark imagination and enhance learning. They agreed that this would be included in their improvement plan so they could capture children's and families' views on this. They also took immediate steps to make the natural play items they already had, indoors and outdoors, more readily available to the children. The spaces available to the children were well maintained and safe, for example, stair gates were available and, in the kitchen, there were locks on cupboard doors.

The outdoor area was fully enclosed and provided lots of different surfaces and areas to explore. This area had previously been identified by the service as requiring improvements. Their floor book captured the improvements that had been made to the layout and resources on offer. This also showed how the childminder had gathered children's views and how their wishes had been included in the new plans. This meant that children's needs and preferences had been considered and the garden better reflected children's interests.

Children's safety was also carefully considered when they were going out into the local community. The childminder was confident in the use of dynamic risk assessments to enable them to identify and remove risks and ensure children's safety. At all times they spoke calmly and regularly involved the children in assessing risks, for example, when crossing roads on the way to the community garden and playpark. Road safety had been a previous focus for wellbeing, and it was clear that the children knew their routines well.

Children's safety and wellbeing was further supported through the childminder's infection, prevention and control measures. For example, children were well supported in effective handwashing and soap and paper towels were within their reach. This promoted children's independence as well as healthy habits. The

childminders had both undertaken recent training on infection prevention and control, and as a result had updated some of their procedures. This meant that they were confident in ensuring a high quality, safe environment for themselves and the children in their care. There was a clear policy in place for times when children became unwell in the service. This served to minimise the potential spread of infection at these times. A nappy changing table was installed in the bathroom and the childminders wore gloves and an apron during changes, further minimising the risk of spread of infection.

Children's personal information was stored securely, both in paper files and on digital media. The childminders were well-informed about their responsibilities in terms of data protection requirements. This ensured children's and families' privacy and confidentiality.

How good is our leadership?

5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

The service's vision, values, aims and objectives were evident during our visit and reflected the aspirations of the children and families using the service. They set out to be, "A child-led service and offer a wide range of activities to meet children's individual needs". They also offered, "High quality play with an emphasis on the outdoors". It was clear from parents' feedback and the service's own self-evaluation that these objectives were being met. This led to consistently positive outcomes for children. A parent told us, "I have never had any issues with leadership here, in 7.5 years of using this setting. [The childminder] has always shown great care and experience in this area".

A detailed improvement plan was in place for the service which was ambitious and ensured that play was at the heart of improvement planning. The childminder had identified a number of areas to work on and had planned how children and families could be involved. They used national and local guidance to support self-evaluation and had used the Care Inspectorate self-evaluation toolkit to identify areas for development. They had also read inspection reports for other childminders for pointers on how best practice guidance was being implemented elsewhere.

The service had effective quality assurance processes in place to ensure the safe and successful day-to-day running of the service. For example, dates for reviewing personal plans and learning progress were in place. Careful consideration was given to reviewing children's plans with families, ensuring that they were relevant to children's needs. Children and families were meaningfully involved in the development of service. For example, the childminder had taken part in the pilot scheme for funded childcare hours, in partnership with Aberdeenshire Council. The service consulted families on how best to offer the funded hours, to ensure that the service met the needs of children and families. This approach was welcomed by families. Children had been asked their views on redeveloping the craft area, the outdoor area and meals and snacks, and the childminder had revisited their floor book once the changes were in place to evaluate their impact. This showed a strong commitment to involving everyone in self-evaluation processes, which in turn led to high quality, tailored care and support for children. We suggested that a next step for the service could be to develop ways of sharing with families the value of their children's inputs in these improvements, and of using these successes and achievements to inform future improvements.

How good is our staff team?

6 - Excellent

We evaluated this key question as excellent where performance was sector leading with outstandingly high outcomes for children.

Children felt loved, safe and secure through kind and nurturing interactions from the childminders. The childminders had a very good understanding of each child's personality and preferences and used this knowledge exceptionally well to meet their individual needs. They utilised their different skills to ensure positive experiences for children throughout the day. For example, one would support the children as they played, while the other ensured the kitchen was clean ahead of snack and lunch times. The service had a strong ethos based on promoting children's rights through child centred care and this was evident in all their interactions. This in turn ensured a positive impact on children's self-esteem, confidence and independence. Parents strongly agreed that the childminders used their skills to offer high quality care and experiences for their children. One commented, "We are so impressed with what is on offer and how [both childminders] are with the children. It is like having an extended family".

Children were well supported as they transitioned between home and the service. A key strength in supporting this was the outstanding communication with families. Information sharing ensured that children's needs were consistently met. Families agreed and one commented, "Wellie Boots has given my child the best start they could have. Reintegrating after Covid-19 was difficult for a lot of children and I truly believe they have helped my child grow the skills they need to begin school".

Both childminders were committed to continuous professional development and had undertaken essential and useful training courses that enhanced their ability to meet children's needs. All their training and learning had been evaluated for impact and linked to the service improvement plan. The lead childminder was undertaking a degree in childhood studies. This demonstrated their commitment to developing a deeper understanding of child development. The childminders' ongoing learning had continually improved their skills and knowledge. This was reflected in the high quality care, learning and support offered to children and families.

The childminders worked together to ensure effective supervision and were very flexible depending on the needs of the children. This ensured that children were safe and well cared for at all times. They communicated frequently as the day progressed, using language that could also be understood by young children. This promoted children's rights and wellbeing by ensuring they were always made aware of what was about to happen and why. One parent told us that both childminders were particularly skilled in supporting children with neurodiversity and added, "Both [childminders] are fully in control of all aspects of the setting but are extremely warm, kind and friendly to the children too".

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?	6 - Excellent
1.1 Nurturing care and support	6 - Excellent
1.3 Play and learning	6 - Excellent

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?	6 - Excellent
4.3 Staff deployment	6 - Excellent

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