

Small, Susan Child Minding

Stonehaven

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
11 December 2025

Service provided by:
Susan Small

Service provider number:
SP2004938253

Service no:
CS2005093427

About the service

Susan Small offers a childminding service from their home in a residential area of Stonehaven, Aberdeenshire.

The service is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of six children at any one time under the age of 16, of whom no more than three are not yet attending primary school and of whom no more than one is under 12 months. Numbers are inclusive of children of the childminder's family. One child was present during the inspection.

Children are cared for on the ground floor of the property. The garden is not used for childminding purposes, with children accessing outdoor play at nearby parks.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 11 December 2025 between 08:25 and 11:35. 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:

- spent time with children using the service
- received four responses to our request for feedback from families
- assessed core assurances, including the physical environment
- spoke with the childminder
- observed practice and children's experiences
- reviewed documents.

As part of our inspections, we assess core assurances. Core assurances are checks we make to ensure children are safe, the physical environment is well maintained and that a service is operating legally. At the time of this inspection, no improvements were identified relating to core assurances.

Key messages

- Children were at the heart of the service and were cared for by a childminder who knew them and their families well.
- Children experienced warm and caring interactions from the childminder.
- The setting made good use of the local community.
- To strengthen practice, the childminder should seek opportunities to engage with up-to-date, relevant theory and guidance on child development.
- The childminder could make better use of professional learning opportunities to further support high quality play and learning opportunities for children.
- Quality assurance practices could be improved to promote a culture of continuous improvement and positive 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

Leadership	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Children play and learn	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Children are supported to achieve	4 - Good

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

Leadership 3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

Leadership and management of staff and resources

We evaluated this quality indicator as **satisfactory/adequate** where strengths just outweighed the weaknesses.

The ethos of the setting reflected the childminder's values by creating a safe, warm, friendly, and fun environment. However, these values had not been reviewed or updated recently in consultation with children and families. Actively involving families and children in shaping the ethos would promote an inclusive approach where everyone feels valued and respected, reinforcing a strong sense of partnership.

There was some potential for children and families to influence the service and contribute to change. The childminder explained that questionnaires had been used in the past but felt informal conversations with parents were more effective. We suggested exploring the digital tools already in use to gather feedback and ideas that could support improvement. We also highlighted the benefits of sharing any changes implemented as a result of feedback, demonstrating the positive impact on outcomes for children. The childminder listened to children's views within the setting. For example, older children requested visits to local places after school, such as the park and the beach, which they enjoyed on a regular basis. Parents told us their families were meaningfully involved in developing the setting. One parent said, "Feedback is taken on board and acted upon." Another shared, "We have continuous feedback with [the childminder] on how the children are doing and what they need." While some informal consultation took place, introducing more structured and transparent ways for families and children to contribute would strengthen partnership working and ensure the service continues to evolve in response to their needs and interests.

Some quality assurance processes were in place to support positive outcomes for children and families. For example, the childminder shared policies with families to ensure clarity around approaches. We found, however, that several policies still required updating in line with current best practice guidance to maintain relevance and accuracy. This was an area identified for improvement at the last inspection. The childminder had yet to engage with recent publications and recognised audit tools, such as the new 'Quality Improvement Framework for Childminding'. We discussed the benefits of self-evaluation and using this document to identify strengths within the service and highlight areas for development. Implementing a structured self-evaluation process would support continuous improvement, ensuring the service evolves in line with best practice and consistently delivers high-quality outcomes for children and families. An area for improvement was made at the previous inspection and remains in place (see section 'What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection' of this report).

Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

We evaluated this quality indicator as **satisfactory/adequate** where strengths just outweighed the weaknesses.

Through the childminder's supportive interactions, it was evident they had an understanding of how children develop and learn. For example, the childminder used open-ended questions and role modelling to extend play and learning experiences. While the child ate under supervision on the sofa, the childminder demonstrated awareness of choking prevention and strategies to keep children safe. To further enhance high-quality play and learning opportunities, the childminder should make better use of professional learning resources. An area for improvement identified at the previous inspection remains in place (see section 'What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection' of this report).

Since the last inspection, the childminder had completed core training to support children's care and safety, including child protection, food hygiene, and infection prevention and control. These trainings had helped ensure children remain safe and well. The childminder should now consider maintaining meaningful training logs, including reflective notes on how learning had positively impacted outcomes for children.

Regular contact with other local childminders provided opportunities for professional discussion, which the childminder found valuable for their development. Recent training had also supported continuity of care throughout the day. Children were familiar with routines, such as washing hands together, which promoted consistency and contributed to keeping children safe and well.

During the inspection, the childminder remained available to meet individual care needs and ensure effective supervision. For example, they responded to cues by asking if the child was hungry or needed to use the toilet. The childminder also supported smooth transitions by engaging children in conversation, such as asking if they would like a snack soon or suggesting hand washing after craft activities. These interactions helped children feel safe, secure, and well cared for.

Children play and learn 3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

Play, learning and developing

We evaluated this quality indicator as **satisfactory/adequate** where strengths just outweighed the weaknesses.

Since the last inspection, the childminder had not engaged with any training or best practice guidance related to play and learning and was unable to provide examples of developments in this area. To strengthen practice, the childminder should seek opportunities to engage with up-to-date, relevant theory and guidance on child development. This would enhance their understanding and enable them to provide high-quality play and learning experiences that support children's progress. An area for improvement was made at the previous inspection and remains in place (see section 'What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection' of this report).

During the inspection, the child was engaged in play and enjoyed extended periods of uninterrupted exploration. They had opportunities to lead their own play, fostering curiosity and creativity, with the childminder's interactions supporting this. For example, while exploring craft materials, the child discovered a feather and said, "I'm going to use the feathers" as they placed it on a piece of paper. The childminder responded by explaining that glue was needed to stick it and demonstrated how to use a glue stick. The child copied the action, successfully sticking the feather down and receiving praise. Recognising the child's interest in sticking, the childminder extended the experience by saying, "I wonder what else we could stick down?" Together, they explored additional materials such as pom-poms and shiny shapes, which the child enjoyed adding to their craft. These interactions promoted curiosity, supported skill development, and encouraged the child's thinking through effective modelling and responsive engagement.

Children had regular opportunities to develop early language, literacy and numeracy skills through play and meaningful interactions with the childminder. A variety of resources, such as books, mark-making materials, and games were readily available to support this. For example, the child and childminder enjoyed completing jigsaw puzzles together, engaging in conversation about matching colours, identifying shapes, and trying different ways to complete the picture. These experiences encouraged early communication and language development while promoting important social skills such as turn-taking.

During the inspection, children did not spend time outdoors. The childminder explained that they do not use their garden but instead make use of local community spaces to ensure children access fresh air and physical exercise. Parents confirmed that their children regularly enjoyed variety of outdoor experiences. One parent said, "[My child] talks with fondness about going to places with [the childminder] picking conkers at the park, stones at the beach, going to the woods, for example. [They] talk about art activities, building, free play, and interacting with other children." Another parent shared: "After school care only, but children love going to the park, the football pitches to get fresh air. They also love board games and drawing in the house." While outdoor play was not observed during the inspection, evidence from parents indicated that children regularly benefited from varied outdoor experiences, supporting their physical health, wellbeing, and opportunities for exploration and social interaction.

The childminder used digital technology, such as WhatsApp, to share photos and communicate activities with parents. We discussed the benefit of also sharing observations of children's learning, achievements, and next steps, so these could be worked on collaboratively with families. This approach would enable the childminder to plan experiences that are closely aligned with children's interests and their age and stage of development. An area for improvement was made at the previous inspection and remains in place (see section 'What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection' of this report).

Children are supported to achieve 4 - Good

Nurturing care and support

We evaluated this quality indicator as **good**, where there were important strengths within the setting's work and some aspects which could benefit from improvement.

Children were cared for in an environment of warm, responsive care that promoted their overall wellbeing. The childminder engaged with the child at their level, offering support while making play enjoyable, which reflected a trusting relationship. They were attuned to the child's cues and responded promptly to meet their needs during care and play. For example, when the child was completing a craft activity on the floor, the childminder checked their comfort and offered alternative options. This demonstrated the childminder's ability to create a nurturing environment where children feel secure, valued, and understood.

Personal plans were in place for all children, providing the childminder with meaningful insights into each child's development and individual needs. Since the previous inspection, these plans had been reviewed and updated in partnership with parents. This ensured that the information remained current, enabling the childminder to deliver tailored care and support that met the needs of every child.

Daily routines, including snacks, were calm and unhurried, with the childminder sitting alongside the children to provide support and supervision. While sitting on the sofa the child chose to enjoy a relaxed snack. The childminder remained present, ensuring safety while fostering opportunities for social interaction and language development. Good hygiene practices were encouraged, with the child and childminder washing their hands together before eating and after craft activities. The child appeared familiar with these routines, even singing while washing their hands. To further strengthen infection control, the childminder should consider supporting children to wash their hands following snacks and meals.

The childminder had processes in place to help keep children safe. Since the last inspection, they had completed child protection training and should now update their child protection policy to reflect this. At the previous inspection, the childminder was asked to develop written risk assessments to ensure all aspects of children's safety were fully considered. This had not yet been implemented, and we discussed the benefits of having these in place to support ongoing safety and risk management.

The childminder explained that parents were welcomed into the setting daily, creating opportunities for meaningful conversations and supporting children's settling routines. Digital communication tools, such as WhatsApp, were used to share updates and photos of children's experiences. Parents told us they had a positive relationship with the childminder and felt welcomed into their home. One parent said: "My childminder is approachable, respectful, and consistently puts my children's wellbeing at the centre of their care." Another parent shared: "[The childminder] has supported us as a family since the children were 1. [They take] good care of them and [make] an effort to take them to the park and play games with them, which they love. [They] always support us with requests on routines, eating, toilet, pick-up times, etc." This feedback demonstrated a proactive approach to building strong partnerships with parents, promoting continuity of care and positive outcomes for children.

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 progress, the childminder should offer planned experiences relevant to their interests and age and stage of development. This should include but is not limited to using meaningful observations to inform planning.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which states that: 'I am supported to achieve my potential in education and employment if this is right for me.' (HSCS 1.27).

This area for improvement was made on 17 January 2025.

Action taken since then

The childminder offered some planned experiences such as Christmas-themed crafts. Children were engaged in creative tasks such as sticking materials onto paper, which they explored with interest. This was effectively supported through adult modelling. However, observations had not yet been fully utilised to inform future planning.

This area for improvement has not been met and will be reinstated.

Previous area for improvement 2

To support positive experiences and outcomes for children, the childminder should develop quality assurance practices. This should include but is not limited to self-evaluation against relevant guidance, the use of feedback from children and families to inform improvements and planned developments to promote continuous improvement to children's outcomes.

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

This area for improvement was made on 17 January 2025.

Action taken since then

The childminder engaged with parents through face-to-face conversations, fostering positive communication. However, they had yet to gather feedback to inform improvements. Children were encouraged to share their ideas for activities, such as visiting the park or beach, and these suggestions were listened to and acted upon. The childminder had yet to engage with Quality Framework and self-evaluation processes to support improved outcomes for children.

This area for improvement has not been met and will be reinstated.

Previous area for improvement 3

To support children's wellbeing, learning and development, the childminder should undertake professional learning appropriate to their role, and apply their learning to practice. This should include, but is not limited to core training, training on children's play and development and familiarising themselves with current guidance to support their practice and positive outcomes for children.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which states that: 'I have confidence in people because they are trained, competent and skilled, are able to reflect on their practice and follow their professional and organisational codes'. (HSCS 3.14).

This area for improvement was made on 17 January 2025.

Action taken since then

Since the last inspection, the childminder had completed core training to support the safety and wellbeing of children. However, they had not yet engaged in training focused on play and learning, nor had they familiarised themselves with current guidance to enhance practice.

This area for improvement has not been met and will be reinstated.

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

Leadership	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Leadership and management of staff and resources	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Children play and learn	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Playing, learning and developing	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Children are supported to achieve	4 - Good
Nurturing care and support	4 - Good

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