

Hodges, Valerie Child Minding

Grantown-on-Spey

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
27 February 2026

Service provided by:
Valerie Hodges

Service provider number:
SP2009976519

Service no:
CS2009235373

About the service

Valerine Hodges provides a childminding service from their semi-detached property in the town of Grantown-on-Spey. The childminder is registered to provide a care service for a maximum of six children up to 16 years of age. Numbers are inclusive of the childminder's family.

The service is close to local amenities, school and park. The children are cared for downstairs and have access to the living room and kitchen with access to a downstairs toilet. Children also have access to an enclosed garden to the rear of the property.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 25 February 2026, between 11:15 and 12:45. 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:

- observed two minded children.
- received feedback from four families.
- spoke with the childminder.
- observed practice and daily life.
- 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

- The childminder created a welcoming and homely environment where children felt loved, secure, and supported.
- Children experienced interactions which were responsive and caring, contributing positively to their overall wellbeing.
- Planning approaches were informal and based on children's interests and curiosities.
- The childminder had developed positive and trusting relationships with families. They knew children and their families well, which created a warm and welcoming environment.
- The childminder should further develop their approach to self-evaluation and improvement systems to allow them to revisit and reflect what worked well.
- Children's sleep arrangements did not follow safe sleep guidance and should be reviewed.

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

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

Leadership and management of staff and resources

Children benefited from a nurturing, respectful environment where care was at the heart of practice. One parent commented, 'Val is very professional, absolutely great with my child and others, very flexible, warming and all round great'. Actively involving children and families in shaping the service's vision, values, and aims would deepen their sense of belonging and strengthen relationships. This collaborative approach would support the service to remain responsive to their changing needs.

The childminder created a warm and welcoming environment where children felt safe, loved, and secure. Families were kept updated and informed through daily conversations and messaging, including photos. The childminder valued children's and families' views and sought their feedback through ongoing informal discussions. This approach helped them to respond to individual needs and preferences. Parents strongly agreed and agreed they were meaningfully involved in the development of the service. To make the feedback even more useful in the future, the childminder should review questions to focus more closely on specific areas they want to improve. This would help ensure that any changes made are based on what matters most to children and families and is purposeful, supporting targeted improvements.

The childminder engaged positively with the inspection process. She was welcoming, open, and willing to answer questions that supported the evaluation of her service. There were no formal systems in place to assess the quality of the service or identify areas for development. We suggested to the childminder to review the framework; 'A quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors: childminding' to support the progress and development of their service (**see area for improvement one**).

Areas for improvement

1.

To support positive outcomes for children and families, the childminder should strengthen their approach to self-evaluation and improvement. Involving children and families will help shape a responsive and inclusive service.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standard (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).

Children play and learn 3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

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

Playing, learning and developing

Children benefitted from responsive interactions that supported their development and encouraged them to express themselves. This helped build early communication skills and supported children's confidence in using language. The childminder was able to effectively pick up on children's non verbal cues and responded appropriately, reinforcing children's attempts to communicate, for example by repeating words linked to flash cards. These interactions supported children to feel understood and helped extend their learning.

Children were able to play at their own pace. The childminder provided some resources that supported play experiences, such as trains, small-world toys, large cars, and games. These resources encouraged exploration and independent play. Children had access to books to support early literacy opportunities. Opportunities to enhance learning through open ended and natural materials was limited. The introduction of loose parts play could help inspire children's curiosity, creativity, and problem solving skills. This would also support children to make choices and influence their play. In addition, consideration should be given to the range of resources available for older children, as choices were limited (**see area for improvement one**).

Children benefitted from a range of experiences out with the home, including visits to parks and opportunities to feed the ducks. These outings helped promote children's curiosity about the world around them and supported physical development.

Planning approaches were informal and based on children's interests and curiosities. The childminder used photographs to share children's experiences with families, promoting positive parental engagement. While planning was responsive and child-centred, there were limited systems in place to evaluate children's progress and plan meaningful next steps. To further enhance this approach, we discussed the value of strengthening observation and recording practices to support the childminder to effectively identify and respond to children's learning needs (**see area for improvement two**).

Areas for improvement

1. To support children's learning and development, the childminder should ensure children have access to open ended resources and toys appropriate for their age and stage of development. These should provide challenge as well as opportunities for children to develop their natural curiosity.

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

2. To improve outcomes for children, the childminder should develop appropriate systems to record and review children's learning and development. The childminder should use this knowledge to support children's next steps and extend their experiences.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standard (HSCS) which states that: 'My care and support meets my needs and is right for me' (HSCS 1.19).

Children are supported to achieve 4 - Good

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.

Nurturing care and support

Children experienced warm, nurturing, and responsive care from the childminder. The childminder was kind and caring in their interactions, which supported children to feel safe and comfortable in the setting. Children were relaxed and settled, demonstrating trusting relationships and confidence in the childminder's care. The childminder created a welcoming and homely environment where children felt loved, secure, and supported.

The childminder knew children well, including their routines, preferences, and individual needs. They demonstrated an understanding of children's allergies and worked closely with families to ensure children felt included in activities such as baking. This contributed to continuity of care and supported children to feel understood and valued. Personal care routines were handled respectfully. The childminder used gentle touch, soothing language, and comforting cuddles to support children when awakening from sleep. This sensitive and attuned approach helped children feel reassured during vulnerable moments. However, the childminder did not follow safe sleep practices (**see area for improvement one**).

The childminder held some personal plan information for children; however, the forms were not dated, meaning it was unclear whether information was current or reviewed within required timescales. This meant the childminder could not always be assured that children's needs were fully planned for or supported appropriately. The childminder should ensure that personal plans are developed for every child, include all necessary information, and are dated and reviewed at least every six months, or sooner if needs change, to ensure consistent, planned care.

Transitions into the service were planned thoughtfully to support children's wellbeing. Children had opportunities for settling in sessions, allowing them to form early attachments and develop confidence gradually when starting in the service. This supported children to feel safe and reassured during periods of change.

The childminder demonstrated strong communication with families. Regular updates were shared through WhatsApp, allowing parents to feel involved in their child's day and contributing to positive relationships. The childminder had built strong, trusting relationships with families, creating a welcoming environment where parents felt included and valued. This supported effective communication and partnership working, which parents identified as a key strength of the service. Parents comments included, 'Val is very communicative and understanding of family life and always provides updates in a timely manner' and 'We would consider Val part of our family - she has played a huge role in our children's lives. She deeply cares about our children and that is clear in the relationship she has built with all of us'.

Medication paperwork was reviewed, and it was evident that the childminder had systems in place to safely administer medication. This supported children's health and wellbeing and demonstrated an understanding of safe practice.

Areas for improvement

1. To ensure children's safety, emotional security and wellbeing are supported the childminder should ensure they are knowledgeable of safe sleep guidance and implement this in practice.

This is 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, are able to reflect on their practice and follow their professional and organisational codes' (HSCS 3.14).

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
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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