

Donna Cowe Child Minding

East Linton

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
23 March 2026

Service provided by:
Donna Cowe

Service provider number:
SP2011983165

Service no:
CS2011305574

About the service

Donna Cowe provides a childminding service from their property in a residential area in East Linton, East Lothian. The childminder is registered to provide a care service for a maximum of six children at any one time up to 16 years of age and overnight care is not provided.

The service is close to parks, public transport links, the local primary school, shops, and other amenities. Children have access to the kitchen, living room, and upstairs bathroom and spare room.

At the time of our inspection, six children were registered with the service.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 23 March 2026 between 13:00 and 16:10. 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 five responses to our request for feedback from parents/carers through our online questionnaire
- 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, improvements were identified relating to core assurances. We have reported where improvement is necessary within 'Children are supported to achieve'.

Key messages

- Children and their families received a welcoming and friendly service.
- Children's health and wellbeing was supported by daily opportunities to spend time outdoors in the community.
- Children were confident and relaxed in the childminder's care.
- Daily communication supported continuity of care.
- Children had fun through experiences linked to their interests.
- Quality assurance practices could be further developed to promote 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	4 - Good
Children play and learn	4 - Good
Children are supported to achieve	4 - Good

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

Leadership 4 - Good

Quality indicator: Leadership and management of staff and resources

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 experienced a friendly and welcoming environment which reflected the childminder's aims. The service's aims and objectives included "working in partnership with parents" and "encouraging children to explore." Parents commented positively on the ethos of the service. One shared, "The atmosphere is always calm and pleasant" and another advised, "I leave [my child] knowing they will be cared for and treated with kindness and consistency." We discussed reviewing the aims and objectives with children and their families to ensure they remained reflective of current families' needs and wishes.

Families were kept updated and well informed through daily conversations and individual diaries. The childminder valued children's and families' views and sought their feedback through ongoing face-to-face discussions. Children were given choices and asked their views in an age-appropriate way to involve them in decision making about their experiences, such as what they wanted to do. This meant that children and their families played a role in informing change.

Children's experiences were positively influenced by the childminder's informal approach to self evaluation. Reflective practice and ongoing feedback from children and families supported the childminder to develop the service. For example, they had recognised the need to consider the resources available, specifically for younger children, to suit the needs of children currently using the service. The childminder was familiar with best practice guidance, including 'Quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors: Childminding'. We discussed ways of using this to support a more formal approach to self evaluation. This would help to provide clearer structure for identifying strengths and areas for development and would contribute to the cycle of continuous improvement.

The childminder took part in regular training as part of their ongoing learning. This included child protection and first aid, which supported children's safety and wellbeing. They were experienced in their role and continued learning in a further qualification which strengthened their skills and knowledge. For example, they were knowledgeable about strategies to support children's individual patterns of play and shared how they had used this to plan for children's play and learning. This enabled them to build positive relationships and improve the quality of children's experiences and outcomes.

Children play and learn 4 - Good

Quality indicator: Playing, learning and developing

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 happy and busy as they took part in different experiences, both indoors and outdoors. The childminder involved children in discussions about what they would like to do, which encouraged them to make choices and lead their own play. Play experiences matched children's interests and the childminder responded to what children liked. For example, children spent time building with construction kits, using their imagination with small world characters, and reading stories together. Parents commented positively

on the play experiences for children. They shared, "If I communicate an interest [my child] may have [the childminder] acts on this" and "No two days are the same."

Play experiences were enhanced through a range of resources. Children accessed a variety of different toys which encouraged different types of play. Children were offered a mix of spontaneous and planned activities. The childminder shared that children regularly take part in experiences which supports their confidence and development of life skills. For example, children had recently been involved in making soup and were encouraged to be independent. The childminder spent time at the children's level engaging in their play, supporting meaningful engagement.

Regular outdoor learning experiences were strengthened through strong links with the local community. Children enjoyed outings to parks, groups, and local walks, and the childminder had established connections with other childminders to promote social interaction. These experiences supported children's social development and their understanding of the wider world. Parents valued the range of outdoor experiences and shared this was a strength of the service. They commented, "[My child] particularly enjoys the outdoor play experiences that [the childminder] provides, allowing [them] to explore the natural environments within East Lothian", "Always makes such an effort to take the children out to different places and to get fresh air," and "[My child] enjoys trips to the woods and beach, library and Bookbug sessions."

The childminder regularly shared children's achievements with families. Feedback from parents and children helped the childminder plan experiences to support children's next steps in their learning and development. The childminder had previously used development overviews to monitor children's progress and was considering how to track younger children's learning and development. To strengthen children's involvement, we encouraged the childminder to offer opportunities for children to reflect on their experiences and contribute their own thoughts. This would enhance recognition of their learning, support planning of next steps, and further promote their interests through planning experiences they enjoy.

Children are supported to achieve 4 - Good

Quality indicator: 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 happy in the childminder's care. The childminder responded to children in a caring and respectful manner which supported them to feel safe and secure. They received nurturing care through regular closeness, such as the childminder offering comfort and cuddles. These nurturing interactions supported children's emotional wellbeing and development of positive relationships. Parents agreed that they felt connected to the childminder, commenting, "Appreciate the care, warmth and nurture that [is shown] towards [my child]" and "[The childminder] is so approachable and always keeps us updated."

The childminder was knowledgeable about children and their families' needs. Regular communication and information sharing through daily conversations, daily diaries, and messages supported continuity of care. Children's personal plans contained key information, including children's needs and preferences. The childminder shared information about how they supported individual children's needs, such as sleep preferences and personal care needs. We highlighted the benefits of recording these within the plans to further support continuity of care between home and the childminding setting. The childminder agreed to action this. An area for improvement was made at the last inspection and has been reworded to reflect

current guidance around personal planning (see area for improvement 1) (see also section 'What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection' of this report).

Mealtimes were relaxed and unhurried. The childminder provided snacks which were nutritious and catered to children's preferences. Children sat in high chairs, with the childminder nearby. This promoted a calm and sociable experience. Parents commented, "Always a range of healthy snacks, lunches and alternatives if [my child] is not keen on the menu that day" and "There is always a good choice."

Child-centred routines supported children to feel secure and confident. While no children required a sleep throughout the inspection, travel cots were available if needed. Older children were able to rest and relax on comfortable sofas. Children were given reassurance when receiving personal care which respected their dignity. We advised of some improvements to handwashing where running water should be used where possible instead of wipes to support infection control practices. The childminder was responsive to this and agreed to action.

The childminder prepared children for daily activities and transitions, supporting them to know what to expect throughout the day. Carefully planned transitions, including a flexible induction process for new children, allowed them to settle and build confidence. Parents acknowledged that time was taken at drop-off and collection times to discuss information to support children's wellbeing.

The childminder was aware of their responsibility to keep children safe, which was supported by a clear child protection policy. They were confident in identifying and responding to any concerns, helping to support children's safety.

Areas for improvement

1. To support children's health and wellbeing, the childminder should ensure personal plans identify how children's individual needs will be met.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'My personal plan (sometimes referred to as a care plan) is right for me because it sets out how my needs will be met, as well as my wishes and choices' (HSCS 1.15).

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

We recommend that the childminder develop meaningful personal plans for each child in her service. This should include:

- information about children's development (consider using the wellbeing indicators as a basis for observations)

- parental involvement and discussions
- information on how the childminder will meet any identified needs.

This will ensure children are kept safe, healthy, and achieving in the service.

National Care Standards, Early Education and Childcare up to the age of 16: Standard 4 - Engaging with Children.

This area for improvement was made on 6 September 2017.

Action taken since then

Personal plans were in place for each child and held key information, including their medical needs and some preferences. The childminder was knowledgeable about strategies of support and should update personal plans to reflect these.

This area for improvement has not been met and has been reworded under the heading 'Children are supported to achieve' to reflect current guidance.

Previous area for improvement 2

To support children's health and emotional wellbeing, the childminder should refresh her knowledge and understanding of positive transitions and how they can impact on outcomes for children. Special consideration should be given, but not limited, to revisiting 'Realising the Ambition - Being Me' section eight - 'Transitions Matter: To Me'. Above all, the childminder should ensure that children are placed at the heart of all transitions.

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).

This area for improvement was made on 13 June 2025.

Action taken since then

The childminder recognised the importance of transitions and implemented effective strategies to support positive transitions. Induction processes were individual to each child and their family, and time and support was given to allow them to settle and build confidence. The childminder was familiar with relevant best practice guidance and applied this to their practice to support children in receiving effective care and support throughout transitions.

This area for improvement has been met.

Complaints

Please see Care Inspectorate website (www.careinspectorate.com) for details of complaints about the service which have been upheld.

Detailed evaluations

Leadership	4 - Good
Leadership and management of staff and resources	4 - Good
Children play and learn	4 - Good
Playing, learning and developing	4 - Good
Children are supported to achieve	4 - Good
Nurturing care and support	4 - Good

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