Childcare Connections Ltd - Gracemount Day Care of Children

Gracemount Primary School
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Edinburgh
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Telephone: 07715635470

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
12 January 2024

Service provided by:
Childcare Connections Limited

Service provider number:
SP2003002864

Service no:
CS2003011926

About the service

Childcare Connections @ Gracemount is an after school and holiday club run from Gracemount Primary School in Edinburgh. It is part of the Childcare Connections group that offer out of school and holiday care throughout Edinburgh. The club is registered to provide a childcare service to a maximum of 57 children from primary school age to 14 years. Children have access to a large hall space where there is kitchen storage space and a sink for handwashing. They also have access to toilets, playground spaces and use of the school gym hall in negotiation with the school. The service benefits from good local transport links.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Wednesday 10 January 2024 between 14:30 and 18:00. We returned on Thursday 11 January between 14:30 and 18:00 to complete the inspection. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors 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 children using the service and three of their parents
- received digital feedback from an online form from a further 12 parents
- spoke with staff and management
- observed staff practice and daily experiences
- reviewed documents related to the management of the service.

We gave feedback to the manager and the operations manager on Friday 12 January 2024.

Key messages

Children were settled and enjoyed socialising with friends within a comfortable environment.

Children had a variety of play and learning opportunities that enabled them to have fun, work together and learn new skills.

Staff interactions were kind, warm and supportive. They were compassionate and understood children's needs and were committed to meeting them.

Gaps in personal planning meant that some children's needs were not being fully planned for or monitored. The service should ensure that these are consistently maintained and reviewed for all children attending the service.

Self evaluation and quality assurance procedures were beginning to show a positive impact in some areas. The service should continue to build on this to ensure any gaps are identified and filled.

Deployment of staff with the right knowledge and skills was having a positive impact on 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?	4 - Good
How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
How good is our leadership?	4 - 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? 4 - Good

We evaluated this key question as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children, and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality Indicator: 1.1 Nurturing care and support

Children had developed positive relationships with each other and staff. As a result, they were happy, relaxed, and content in the service. Staff were warm and kind in their interactions with children, which created a friendly and supportive atmosphere. This meant children were mostly confident to approach staff when needed, but also enjoyed independently socialising with each other in a calm but purposeful environment. One parent said, "the staff are at the heart of this service. My child adores all the staff. It feels like one big family, and I am supremely confident in the abilities of each staff member. They are compassionate, caring, and proactive".

The staff team were working proactively with school staff to support the sharing of relevant information and strategies to support children's care needs. During inspection school staff came along to the club to collaborate around individual children and their daily experience. This meant children were well nurtured and supported through consistency of care throughout the day.

Children's individual dietary requirements were well considered and planned for. In addition, snacks were healthy and varied and the team were working hard to follow best practice guidelines. This helped maintain children's health and wellbeing. The snack experience could be improved to allow for a smoother start to the session. Children queued to sign into the club and to wash their hands, resulting in them waiting for quite a long time to eat or play. Staff could consider also using the toilet facilities for children to wash their hands. This would reduce the queuing time and give children more time to eat and have fun.

On the second day in particular, staff sat with children during snack which strengthened bonds and maintained safety while eating as they chatted together. Children were asked for feedback on snack options, but their involvement in the planning or preparation of snack was limited. The staff team should consider how they can further involve children in snack experiences. This would provide opportunities to develop life skills around preparing foods and clearing up, as well as independence and responsibility. Overall, children had positive mealtime experiences that promoted their wellbeing.

Staff were knowledgeable about children's health and medication needs, demonstrating that they knew how to keep them safe and healthy. All required medication was present in the service, recorded and stored according to best practice. However, although medication was reviewed with parents, it was not done within recommended timescales. The service should do this every three months, and ensure that each plan has an approach to follow which would give staff clarity on what to do if a medicine failed to work. This would ensure that all records were working documents reflecting up to date information, and were individualised for children's needs.

Children's personal plans needed further work to promote continuity and consistency of care for all children. Where the service and families had collaborated in personal plans, they held information around children's individual wishes and likes as well as dislikes or strategies of support. This meant plans were effective in providing information to care for children. However, some children's plans were incomplete and not reviewed within required timescales, meaning potential important pieces of information were missing to fully support individual children. The staff team should now ensure these are fully completed with children and families and updated and reviewed at least every six months or before when things change. This would ensure that children's strategies of support, their views and changing needs are understood and adapted where necessary and allow all children to thrive in a club where staff know them well and take their views into account **(see area for improvement 1)**.

Quality indicator 1.3: Play and learning

A good balance of planned and responsive experiences meant children were engaged in meaningful play of their choice. Experiences such as art, activities with beads, card and board games and role play, as well as a variety of free play resources were easily accessible in boxes. This supported children with different opportunities to play and explore their ideas. On the second day there were a large variety of open-ended resources out for children which encouraged them to construct and use their imagination. Children of different ages were absorbed in storytelling and building different worlds. This gave children opportunities to be creative, problem solve and enquire, as well as collaborate with others.

Children also had fun making and flying aeroplanes they had made from a craft kit, and one member of staff skilfully extended this by setting targets for the children to reach. This resulted in children having lots of fun and competing to see who could make the target. Children developed different numeracy and language skills as well as social and emotional skills around competition, turn taking and problem solving when it wouldn't fly. A parent told us, "there is a friendly, supportive environment. The children are free to choose activities, and are always consulted". The staff team were open to reflection on the provision of more open ended and interesting craft resources. The arts and crafts area was busy and well attended. Providing more equipment and resources such as glue, wool, or different shapes for example, would give children further opportunities to spark their creativity.

At times some children were not engaged in play. When asked, they told us they would like to be able to spend more time outdoors, in the gym, and on electronic devices. One parent told us, "My child wants to play outdoors every day but is not always allowed to do so. Outdoor play seems to be limited to good weather but if children are wearing appropriate clothing then why not?". Children also told us that they were often not allowed to go outdoors during winter months. The staff team were open to looking at ways to provide experiences more proactively for children, showing they were responsive to their preferences.

Children were not outside on the first day of inspection due to some adverse weather conditions. However, on the second day, children were able to go outside for most of the session. There were squeals of laughter from children and delight as staff played hide and seek games with them, or chase games where they could see who ran the fastest. Children were having fun with peers, and engaging in active play which benefitted their overall wellbeing and health. Consideration should be given to how any barriers such as lack of lighting or cold weather could be rectified in the future, so that it did not limit children's experiences and their choices about where they want to play.

Resources were limited outdoors to a few hoops and balls. There was a big cage which held resources, but these were not easy to access. Staff could consider getting these out onto the playground for children to be able to see them and choose what they wish to enhance their play. They could also provide a larger variety of loose parts for children to use to further support children's creativity and fun and give them further opportunities to work together.

Staff used observations of play and discussions with children to plan play and learning opportunities. For example, children were asked for their feedback about experiences on offer. These suggestions were then taken forward by staff in planning. This meant children were gaining opportunities to enjoy experiences that reflected their changing interests. On inspection, the floor book encouraged children to remember previous experiences from the club and to ask for those they enjoyed again. The staff team should ensure the floor book is always accessible to children to continue to use and reflect on. This would allow this meaningful child led discussion to continue, and to continue to provide laughter and fun as they looked at their photographs and planned future experiences.

Areas for improvement

1. The service should ensure all personal plans capture details of all children's needs, interests, dislikes and wishes as well as any strategies of support with parents or carers. All plans should be reviewed every six months, or earlier as and when things change. This will allow the service to reflect and plan for the changing needs of children over time.

This is to ensure care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state that:

"My personal plan is right for me because it sets out how my needs will be met, as well as my wishes and choices." (HSCS1.15)

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.

Quality indicator 2.2: Children experience high quality facilities

Children experienced a spacious, well-lit, and well-ventilated environment which contributed to their overall health and wellbeing. Designated areas for play and eating promoted children's comfort and supported engagement, as did more restful areas which provided rugs and cushions. This helped to give the setting a homely feel. The large outdoor playground encouraged children to be active and enjoy time in the fresh air, when this space was open. The staff team should continue to ensure where possible, this is always an option moving forward.

Effective systems were in place to ensure children's safety and wellbeing. For example, registers, signing in using an online platform, and walkie talkies were used to manage children's movements within the service, as well as keep staff informed when children were at other clubs after school. Children were given freedom to move around the indoor space allowing them to make choices about how and where they spent their time. A variety of resources gave children opportunities to explore, develop their interests, engage with peers or spark their curiosities. Some children appeared less confident to ask for resources, or didn't know or remember what was available in cupboards. Providing something for children to view options available if they are not out on display, such as a catalogue could be considered moving forward. This would further enable children's choices to be respected and provided for.

Consistent cleaning practices meant children's health and wellbeing was respected and protected. Toilets and handwashing facilities were clean, and cleaners were on site to top up stocks of appropriate materials such as soap and paper hand towels. Daily and weekly checklists ensured robust checks of equipment and maintenance checks were achieved. Risk assessments were in place to keep children safe both indoors and out. Staff should consider involving children in these risk assessments moving forward so they have ownership of them. This would encourage children to assess and manage their own risk in a supportive way.

Some children were picked up from a neighbouring school. This procedure was well managed to ensure children's safety and wellbeing. Staff had organised two pickups for different ages of children so that children did not have to wait and could begin to engage in club experiences more quickly. Walkie talkies to communicate with the club if children were absent, as well as having first aid kits and a club phone with emergency contacts all supported a streamlined process and kept children safe and well.

How good is our leadership? 4 - Good

We evaluated this key question as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children, and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality Indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well

There was a strong ethos amongst the team around valuing children's choices and their right to play. Although there was a historical vision and values in place, it was not clear that any current families, staff and children had input into it. Moving forward, the service could use their ethos and values to refresh their vision allowing for input from everyone involved in the club. This would ensure it reflected the current community and gave everyone a shared purpose for the service. This could then be used to inform future improvements.

Clear systems were in place to further develop and improve, such as an ongoing improvement plan using some self-evaluation using the Care Inspectorate Quality Framework (2022). The staff team were using this to benchmark their performance. This meant the club was benefitting from an ongoing cycle of improvement. For example they had been trialling different approaches around the provision of snack. To make procedures more robust and monitor experiences for children, the service should continue to evaluate and reflect on the impact of improvements put in place. This would ensure gaps in personal plans and medication plans, for example, were effectively monitored. This quality assurance would also ensure they were updated and reviewed within required timescales, and that potential important pieces of information were not missed.

Successes and achievements were shared with families through an online platform. One parent told us this had helped to instigate discussions with their children on what they had been doing that day. Families appreciated this extra insight into their child's lives and it allowed for collaboration between club and home.

Children and families felt involved in the club and able to influence some change. In feedback to us, almost all families felt their views were taken into account and used to influence change within the setting. The service had put questionnaires out themselves to parents to gather information recently. This showed the service was proactive in seeking views. Children were regularly asked for their views, both verbally and in feedback sheets about their experiences. These sheets asked mostly closed questions which limited the amount of information that could be purposefully used. Asking more open-ended questions may make this more meaningful and allow the staff team to further examine and discuss what would make things better for the children. However, this practice showed children's views were valued and was facilitating the club to move and change in response to children's changing interests and wishes.

The management team had focused on creating a positive culture that supported improvement and high aspirations for the club. There was strong desire to improve outcomes for children. Team meetings and support sessions including staff appraisals were beginning to support the team to reflect on improvements. This was resulting in staff having a greater understanding of how they could support children's play. These appraisals could be more effective by including focused targets for staff which could be reviewed over time. This would ensure staff have well defined areas to contribute to sustained improvement linked to the development plan or an area of their interest.

The manager had also protected time for staff to engage in learning of their choice. Some staff told us they had undergone training in how to support children with some additional support needs. This helped to develop a well-trained team and increased capacity to support children's needs, wishes and interests. In our feedback forms, one parent told us, "It is telling how involved all levels of leadership are. From the top down, every worker clearly cares and takes pride in their work".

How good is our staff team? 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.

Quality indicator 4.3: Staff deployment

Deployment and levels of staff were effective in ensuring high quality outcomes for children. The manager was supernumerary, but supported staff and children throughout the session. As a result, the manager was vigilant and responsive to situations as they arose, for example to cover for staff if children took them elsewhere, or to help children to get resources as requested. The wellbeing of staff was also considered. The manager checked in on staff and moved them around between indoors and outdoors due to the low temperatures so everyone got a break. Robust systems were in place allowing a staff member to check where children were when they attended other clubs and due to come to the after school club later. This ensured children were kept safe from harm.

Staff absences were well planned for. A rota allowed the management team to identify gaps ahead of time and make appropriate staffing provision for the care and welfare of children. Staff felt well supported if absences arose. In our feedback, one told us, "when staff are absent cover is set in place to ensure the ratio is kept so we can support and care for children fully". This showed the service considered the needs of both staff and children and resulted in high quality outcomes. Similarly, effective weekly rotas were in place. These gave staff different areas of responsibility over the week to ensure resources were refreshed and experiences were fun, with flexibility built in to move in response to children's wishes if required.

Arrangements were in place to support during busier times of the day, such as pickups. One member of staff was always allocated to the door which resulted in positive transitions and effective communication with families. This meant other staff were on hand to continue to support children's play, whilst another was available to pass on any news from their child's day to parents and carers.

The staff team were well established, and had a strong mix of skills, knowledge and experience to build on and support each other. They were flexible with each other throughout the session by communicating with each other where they needed to leave an area, or if they required any extra support. This resulted in children receiving high levels of care leading to positive outcomes. One parent told us, "I could not be happier with the care our child receives in such a nurturing environment. The staff also always have time to interact with parents or guardians and remember details. I cannot recommend this service highly enough. There is a fantastic mix of independent play, led activities and new opportunities for children to embrace. Both socially and academically it has been advantageous for our child to attend".

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?	4 - Good
1.1 Nurturing care and support	4 - 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?	4 - Good
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	4 - Good

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

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