The Squirrel Club
Day Care of Children

Balgreen Primary School
Balgreen Road
Edinburgh
EH11 3AT

Telephone: 07415 739 261

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
22 August 2025

Service provided by:
Balgreen playgroup

Service provider number:
SP2003002904

Service no:
CS2003012001

About the service

The Squirrel Club is located in the Balgreen area in Edinburgh and is close to local amenities and bus routes around the City. The service is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 61 primary school age children during term time and to a maximum of 30 primary school aged children during school holidays at any one time. The service is run from a portacabin in the groups of Balgreen Primary School. The portacabin consists of two large playrooms, a kitchen, an office, cloak room and toilets. Additional toilets are available within the school.

Aims of the service had been developed. These included to provide high-quality childcare within a warm and welcoming environment, and to respect and nurture the individuality of each child. The individuality of each child in our care will be respected and nurtured.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Tuesday, 19 August 2025 from 14:15 until 18:00 hours and Wednesday, 20 August 2025 from 14:15 until 17:30 hours. 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 children using the service
- reviewed feedback from 19 families and spoke directly to three parents/carers
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents
- spoke with management.

As part of this inspection, we undertook a focus area. We have gathered specific information to help us understand more about how services support children's safety, wellbeing and engagement in their play and learning. This included reviewing the following aspects:

- staff deployment
- safety of the physical environment, indoors and outdoors
- the quality of personal plans and how well children's needs are being met
- children's engagement with the experiences provided in their setting.

This information will be anonymised and analysed to help inform our future work with services.

Key messages

- Children experienced nurturing, warm and kind interactions from staff.
- Children were engaged in their play and interested in what was available to them as they led their own learning.
- Staff were positive about their role and had good relationships with children and their families.
- Children benefitted from the spacious environment indoors and outdoors.
- Children experienced outdoor learning in nature through regular visits to the woodlands area.

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?	5 - Very 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? 5 - Very Good

We evaluated this key question as very good, where major strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children with very few areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support.

Children experienced warm and friendly interactions from staff as they were welcomed into the out of school care. Children were relaxed and comfortable in staffs' company and friendly interactions took place throughout the session. A parent commented, "Staff are very friendly and comfortable. My kids are very happy." This meant that children had positive and secure relationships with staff.

Personal plans were reflective of current guidance and were reviewed with parents as information changed. Parents, children and staff contributed to the information held within plans and staff could confidently talk through approaches to support children. Plans detailed strategies of support for children with additional support needs. This enabled staff to care for, review and adjust strategies in response to children's changing needs. As a result, children received the right care and support at the right time.

Self-service snack was available to children throughout the session, enabling them to choose when and what they ate. Staff sat with children and ensured they were supervised as they spoke to them about their day at school. This meant that children experienced mealtimes that were unhurried and sociable.

Children's emotional wellbeing was supported through an interactive display board that reflected the principles of 'Getting it right for every child'. Children actively engaged in identifying how they felt and staff sensitively followed this up by checking in with children during the session. For example, a child had written "I am tired" and staff were able to ensure the child had space on the sofa to relax. This meant that children had an opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings in a way that felt comfortable to them, as they were listened to and had their needs met.

Quality indicator 1.3: Play and learning.

Approaches to planning were balanced between planned opportunities and responsive to children's interests. Children spoke enthusiastically about the activities available, and that they could make suggestions or ask for resources and staff would ensure this was provided. For example, a child wanted to play with the car track and space was created to allow the child to make the track as large as they wanted. Children attending the holiday club contributed to their experiences by sharing their ideas and preferences about themed activities and trips. Children participated in the evaluation of the holiday club and this was used to inform future plans. This meant that children were able to develop and lead their play.

Children had access to core resources that were presented well and inviting, including art areas, books and construction. Children were engaged in their play; a child was busy creating their own story with staff supporting through scribing for them. This meant that children's literacy and creativity was supported by responsive staff. Space was created to allow children to expand their play such as car tracks, construction and board games. This provided play opportunities that children may not have outwith the service.

Diversity and children's rights were welcomed across the service. An interactive world map celebrated

diversity within the club. This was an embedded approach in practice that was reflective of the children, their families and the local community. Children had explored themes around equality and equity through discussions about children's rights and Pride month. As a result, children identified that the core values they had discussed should be part of their daily values in the service. For example, children identified that "we will help new children feel welcome." We observed older children looking after and playing with younger and new children.

Children benefitted from variety in the opportunities for outdoor play that was accessible throughout the session. The playground was used daily for large physical play, providing space and freedom to run. Traditional playground games were facilitated by staff and enjoyed together with children as they had fun. The woodland area in the grounds enabled children to learn, explore and be curious in nature. A bird watching station was set up indoors looking out to the woodlands and provided a link between indoors and outdoors as children watched and learned about the birds in their area, using technology to identify birdsong.

The service had established links within the local community, including the school, library and nursery all situated close by. Children had regular visits to the local park and greenspaces. Children participated in the local art installation in the Balgreen tunnel. This further strengthened the service and children's connection within the local community.

How good is our setting? 5 - Very Good

We evaluated this key question as very good, where major strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children with very few areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 2.2: Children experience high quality facilities.

Children benefitted from an environment that was comfortable, clean and tidy. The rooms were warm and well ventilated. There were areas for children to rest and have quiet times alone and with friends in both rooms. A parent commented, "When my child was unwell, he could rest on the sofa while he waited to be collected. It was nice to know there was space for him to do that." This gave a strong message to children that they mattered.

The rooms were structured and laid out for core provision that was relevant to children's age and interests. Children from different school year groups were able to move across the rooms. This enabled children to revisit play experiences, such as role play, and for children of different ages to enjoy common interests. For example, there were two children of different ages who played together with transformer characters, sharing their ideas together. Older children had fun as they role played with dolls in the home area. This created opportunities for play experiences to be more accessible to all children.

Children accessed resources that were looked after and of a good quality. Staff role modelled and guided children in how to treat resources with respect. Children had participated in fundraising and chose new resources for the service. As a result, children had ownership of the resources and how to care for them.

Effective systems were in place for collecting children from school and children were familiar with the routine, including washing their hands on arrival. Children were able to let staff know when they were moving from indoors and outdoors, allowing staff to communicate to each other. This meant that children had freedom to choose where they played and staff communicated well, ensuring all children were

accounted for. The environment was safe and secure entry system and grounds to the playground were secure. Risk assessments were in place and reviewed with children beginning to use the Care Inspectorate keeping children safe campaign SIMOA to help them to assess risk. This enabled children to develop their decision making and problem solving skills.

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.

Children's right to play and have fun was part of the vision for the service. This was shared by staff through playful interactions and observations. The service had recently introduced the Care Inspectorate's keeping children safe campaign, SIMOA. This included introducing a soft toy character SIMOA that was used to explore themes around risk and safety. As a result, children were beginning to implement simple risk assessments and solutions into daily tasks and routines, including when visiting the woodlands and before all children played in the playground. Children participated in fundraising activities to raise money for additional resources. Children created a wish list that influenced the purchase of new resources.

An improvement plan was in place with clear objectives and aspects of self-evaluation beginning to be used. We discussed approaches to strengthen self-evaluation by using guidance documents to facilitate discussions within the team to identify areas that need to be developed further. This would help the team to engage with best practice from the ELC sector to further improve outcomes for children.

Questionnaires and informal discussions were used to gather views from parents, who provided general feedback on the service as a whole. The service should continue to engage families in improvement planning. The manager told us that there were plans to gather feedback more often across the year moving forward. Children's views were gathered through questionnaires and floor books; for example, children's feedback on the holiday club sessions. Floor books were used to capture children's views on staff skills and strengths. This information was used for follow-up discussions and to contribute to staff appraisals and professional reflection. Children's feedback had also contributed to a change in the manager being more accessible for children. Overall, children's voices were sought, heard and used to improve aspects of the service.

Systems were in place to support quality assurance, including rotas and daily checklists, which ensured that play spaces and resources were of a high quality. A quality assurance calendar was in place but not yet being fully implemented. As a result, some tasks had not been actioned within the timescale set by the service. We suggested distributing some tasks across the team, where appropriate, to support quality assurance across the service. This would also enhance a shared leadership approach.

There has been a decrease in the membership of the service's committee as children and families move on from primary school. The manager recognises that having a more established committee would enhance and support the service further. As a result, there are plans to encourage additional membership of the committee.

How good is our staff team? 5 - Very Good

We evaluated this key question as very good, where major strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children with very few areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 4.3: Staff deployment.

Staff were respectful towards one another and worked well together. This created a positive environment for children in which they felt safe and secure. Staff were happy and spoke positively about the children and the service. This reflected the support and professional development received from the service. Mandatory training was up-to-date and professional development and learning was valued. Staff spoke positively about their own learning and were reflective on the impact it had on their practice. For example, child protection training enabled staff to consider children's experiences and how their practice could further support children's wellbeing. A member of staff commented that, "It enables me to keep up to date with current legislation." As a result, children experienced staff who were open to new ideas and approaches that supported learning and wellbeing for children.

Absences were effectively managed and had limited impact on the experiences for children. The rota had been developed to allow for a member of staff to fill any gaps as a result of absences. Verbal and written communication between staff enabled them to know what play experiences had been planned for children and they were able to take this forward. This meant that children had continuity of care and play.

Annual appraisals provided an opportunity for staff to reflect with the manager and to plan their professional development for the year ahead. Staff spoke positivity about their appraisals and the support they received from the manager. As a result, this strengthened the team approach to the service.

Staff communicated effectively with each other when tasks took them away from their responsibilities, which enabled colleagues to deploy themselves to ensure children were supervised and cared for. Effective mentoring processes were in place for new staff as part of their induction. This ensured that staff were supported and clear on the expectations of their role and practice, and as a result, children experienced continuity of care.

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?	5 - Very Good
1.1 Nurturing care and support	5 - Very 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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Contact us

Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

enquiries@careinspectorate.com

0345 600 9527

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