Robert Smillie Memorial Primary Nursery Class and Skylark Early Learning Centre Day Care of Children

Glen Avenue
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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
31 January 2024

Service provided by:
South Lanarkshire Council

Service provider number:
SP2003003481

Service no:
CS2003015327

About the service

Robert Smillie Memorial Primary Nursery Class and Skylark Early Learning Centre is located in Larkhall, South Lanarkshire. The service is registered to provide a care service to 111 children aged from two to those not yet attending primary school.

Children are cared for within two adjacent buildings. Each playroom has direct access to a dedicated outdoor play space and access to natural environments within the grounds and wooded areas nearby. The service is close to shops, parks and public transport links. There are established links with various groups in the local community.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 29 January 2024 at 08:45 and continued on 30 and 31 January ending at 14:30 when feedback was shared with the management team.

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 approximately 20 children using the service and consulted with 14 of their parents/carers
- spoke with most staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents
- consulted with three visiting professionals.

Key messages

- A particular strength was the caring, nurturing ethos and consistent approach evident across the whole service.
- Children benefitted from a spacious, indoor and outdoor play and learning environment.
- To ensure everyone's safety, the provider should action repairs and maintenance issues reported by the service over a year ago.
- The strong, effective management team supported all staff to have high aspirations and confidence in their abilities to support children and their families.
- Consideration should be given to the deployment of staff and some routines to ensure all available space is planned for appropriately for all children throughout the day.

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?	4 - Good
How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
How good is our staff team?	4 - 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 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.

1.1: Nurturing care and support

Staff knew children and families very well. Inviting families into the service daily and for 'stay and play' sessions indoors, outdoors and on outings within the local community supported positive relationships, open communication and trust. This contributed to families feeling welcomed, respected and included.

Most children were very happy and confident leading their own play, while some were still settling into the service with staff and parental support. Staff interactions with all children were kind, calm and nurturing, with staff being responsive to children's cues and requests. Children were offered cuddles, supported to share their feelings, make choices and find solutions. This consistent nurturing approach across the whole service contributed to children feeling safe, respected and loved.

The importance of children's rights and emotional wellbeing was evident throughout the setting. Communication, displays, books and discussions highlighted the importance of this. Children who were re-visiting prior play and learning experiences within large books, pointed to photographs and drawings and told us, 'That was the day I felt loved.' This opened a conversation in the small group about feelings. Discussing emotional wellbeing enables children to get to know themselves, develop in confidence and self-esteem and supports a healthy, emotional outlook for life.

Children's privacy, dignity and independence was promoted. Staff were respectful and sensitive to children's personal care needs. They asked each child if they wanted to have their nappy changed, gave children time to wake up fully from naps and assisted them where required throughout the session, for example, with hand washing, wiping noses or going to the toilet.

Personal plans were in place for all children. An informative overview page highlighted the main care and support needs, routines and interests of each child. Detailed 'all about me' booklets and clear strategies to assist children who had additional support needs were in place and regularly reviewed. These systems were used effectively to provide consistency and continuity for the child. There were plans in place to review children's individual targets/next steps to ensure these were relevant for each child and reflective of their needs, interests and stage of development.

Strong relationships with external agencies ensured children got the support they needed to reach their full potential. Visiting professionals commented, 'Staff are always keen to work with our service to ensure they have all the relevant information and support in place to meet the needs of the children' and 'I feel staff have a good understanding of how to utilise our service for the needs of their children. Where they feel they need further support they will always seek this in an appropriate and professional way.'

All 14 parents we consulted with agreed staff knew their child well, including what they liked and what was important for their care. They all felt fully involved in their child's care, including their development and reviewing their personal plan. Comments included, 'My child enjoys nursery and has a great bond with staff. They come home happy and tell us about their day.

We see lots of their learning on the learning journal. All we want is for them to learn and develop in a nurturing environment and we feel they are receiving this.'

Children chose from a healthy options menu for snack and lunch. A rolling snack and lunch meant children could choose when to eat within smaller group sittings. This created a pleasant, sociable and relaxed experience where children poured their own drinks and served their own food alongside their friends. Adult support was in place where required and staff sat alongside children to engage in conversation and ensure their safety while eating. Although children had access to drinking water throughout the day, further consideration should be given to how all children could access water freely and independently. As positive mealtime experiences support child development, develop key social skills as well as healthy eating habits, we advised the service to continue with their plans to regularly monitor all children's mealtime experiences.

Medication was stored in line with guidance. We advised where procedures and associated documentation could be improved to contribute to children's overall health, safety and wellbeing. This was actioned over the course of the inspection.

Management and staff were clear about their roles and responsibilities in keeping children safe. Staff had annual child protection training relevant to their role and confidently told us about the procedures they would follow should they have concerns. When required, appropriate action was taken promptly which ensured children's health, safety and wellbeing.

1.3: Play and learning

Most children were actively engaged in leading their own play and learning through a balance of free play and planned activities and experiences, both indoors and outdoors. Children were having fun as they explored their environment and used their imagination. We observed some high quality observations and very good use of open questions from staff. Staff were very aware of when to observe and waited for children to invite them into their play. Examples included going on a bear hunt outdoors, being police officers, creating a pirate ship from loose parts materials, exploring soap bubbles and caring for babies in the home corner. This supported and extended children's interests, thinking, imagination, skills and knowledge.

Planning approaches were child-centred and responsive to children's interests. Most children freely accessed a wide range of resources within a stimulating, challenging and creative setting, both indoors and outdoors. There was very good use of loose parts materials across the service, which created a rich learning environment.

Play experiences developed children's skills in language, literacy and numeracy with books, mark making opportunities, number games and symbols evident inside and outside. As a result most children played happily and confidently and were progressing well. When asked what they liked about the service, one child shared, 'Playing outside, all the playdough and being a lunch helper.'

Children's achievements and progress were recognised, celebrated and shared with children and their families. Any additional supports were identified, discussed with families, plans put in place and agreed strategies implemented. This responsive approach ensured children were fully supported to develop a wide range of lifelong learning skills.

Makaton, which is a communication tool using speech, signs and symbols, was used effectively by all staff with children throughout the service. This assisted staff and children to share information about their needs, play and learning. Following the success of this programme and parents' interest, a sign of the week had been introduced recently and shared with all families. This fully supported some children's needs and included all children and families who were continuing this when playing and communicating at home.

There should be continued monitoring of playrooms and increased use of visuals in some areas. This would ensure all children had increased opportunities to communicate their needs and wishes, make choices of where to play and what to play with and freely access a wide range of resources and materials throughout the full session.

Children had strong links with each other across the service and within their local community. Children from different playrooms had opportunities to come together in small groups to meet new friends and take part in joint experiences. This included sport coaching, visits to the local library and meeting older people at a 'knit and natter' group. This group supported inter-generational friendships and led to some children showing an interest in learning how to knit. Forest adventure groups provided children with opportunities to play, explore and investigate a natural environment. This increased children's confidence, extended their social, physical and creative skills, extended their knowledge and understanding of their world. This also provided an opportunity for parents to join their children in play outdoors at a 'stay and play' session.

How good is our setting? 4 - Good

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

2.2: Children experience high quality facilities

The service had been extended to accommodate additional numbers of children. Natural light from large windows, direct access to the outdoors from each playroom and ventilation throughout both buildings created play spaces which were bright, welcoming and spacious for children. Within individual playrooms there was good quality furniture and space for children's belongings and artwork. This gave a message to children that they mattered. Some playrooms had adjusted lighting throughout the day which created a calm, nurturing environment. Shared play spaces of a multi purpose pitch, natural grassed and wooded areas and sensory rooms provided additional space for children to engage in more active play, rest or relaxation.

The service were pro-active to advice given over the course of the inspection. Continued monitoring of indoor playroom environments would ensure cosy, comfortable, homely and well-resourced spaces were maintained for all children. This would contribute to children feeling relaxed, safe and secure.

Secure entry systems, fob access to playrooms and fully enclosed outdoor areas contributed to children's safety. The service had expanded the Care Inspectorate's resource for keeping children safe, 'Look, Think, Act' by introducing a toy elephant called Simoa and recording children's experiences in a floor book. This was freely accessible for children to look through. Children had recorded how they had checked for any hazards and completed a pictorial risk assessment sheet to highlight their findings. This gave children an increased awareness and responsibility for ensuring their own safety and that of others. Children said, 'We need Simoa' when going to the forest.

All parents we consulted with strongly agreed that the service was clean, well maintained and that their children were safe. Comments included, 'Very happy with the nursery environment and there are so many different spaces for my child to explore.'

Handwashing facilities, toilets and nappy changing areas were accessible within each playroom. Immediate action was taken in response to the storage of resources which should be stored out of the reach of children at all times. Adaptations needed to support good infection prevention and control within one nappy changing area were currently in progress. This contributed to children's health and safety. We discussed some maintenance issues which were necessary to ensure everyone's safety and to be in line with good infection prevention and control practices. These repairs were in the process of being rectified at the time of writing this report.

Children's information was stored securely. Appropriate systems were in place to manage electronic information. This was in line with general data protection requirements and ensured safety and confidentiality.

How good is our leadership? 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.

3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well

The management team worked very closely together. Through their dedication and passion and good working relationships with staff, they had created a calm, nurturing environment, an ethos of support and continuous improvement. As a result there were positive outcomes for children and their families. An open door policy meant families and staff could come at any time for support, which added to the welcoming, inclusive ethos. Parents told us, 'Very happy how the nursery is managed and my thoughts are listened to well' and 'The staff are outstanding people. Always welcomed with a smile and kind words, always asking how the parents are as well as the child. If you ever have any questions they are happy to answer right away and help you as best they can. It is truly an amazing setting for the kids.'

There were shared visions, values and aims for the service following consultation with children, families and staff. This resulted in a document 'Together we learned, we grew', which the service were very proud of. The vision was displayed throughout the buildings and within documentation as a visual reminder for families, staff and visitors.

An improvement plan with key priorities was used as a working document. To ensure people felt included and their views respected, children, families and staff were consulted on key areas of development. Most staff who responded to our questionnaires felt quality assurance impacted positively on outcomes for children and most felt they were fully involved in the self-evaluation of the service.

All parents who responded to our questionnaires strongly agreed that they were confident the service was well managed and agreed that they and their child were involved in a meaningful way to help develop the service, with their ideas and suggestions used to influence change. One parent commented, 'As the service being together is fairly new, I feel the small issues I believe would make the service better are already being improved, for example, better communication at handovers. I had only found issues with this on a couple of occasions and when brought to the management's attention, it was worked on.'

The strong leadership had supported staff to have high aspirations and confidence in their role and abilities. Staff shared management's passion and were very keen to share their positive experiences of individual leadership roles and how they were developing particular areas to ensure positive outcomes for children. Staff told us, 'Leadership is effective at all levels in our setting. Practitioners lead champion roles with support from our team leader and depute.'

We shared information on required notifications which must be submitted to the Care Inspectorate. These notifications were submitted over the course of the inspection. Management should ensure they are familiar with the document 'Records that all registered care services must keep and guidance on notification reporting' and keep abreast of updated provider's policies and procedures to update their own.

How good is our staff team? 4 - Good

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

4.3: Staff deployment

The importance of ensuring the service was appropriately staffed was recognised as essential by the management team. Although there was staff absence over the course of the inspection, there were sufficient staff in place to meet the number and care and support needs of the children in attendance, with a mix of skills and experience across the staff team. Staff were observed working well together. They were flexible, communicated well and supported each other to support good outcomes for children.

Management and staff welcomed children and their parents/carers into the service. All staff knew children well and fed back verbally to parents at the end of their day, as well as uploading information within learning journals regularly. This supported the nurturing ethos, built positive relationships with families and ensured parents knew about their child's routines, play and learning.

All parents who completed our consultations strongly agreed they were confident staff had the appropriate skills, knowledge and experience to care for their child and support their learning. Most agreed there were always enough staff in the setting. Comments included, 'It is a worry sending your child into other people's care, but the nursery have made me feel so comfortable with this and I fully trust my child is safe and all care needs are met' and 'They are helpful, supportive, kind and great with the children.' One child added, 'They are fun and I love them all.'

Overall, we observed children and staff making good use of all available space, with most children being able to access the indoor and outdoor environments independently. We advised reviewing and monitoring some routines, particularly at the start and end of sessions and maximising the use of all available space for children. This would contribute to ensuring high quality outcomes for all children throughout their day.

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

The time children spend outdoors should be extended. Staff should further involve the children in managing risk during their play.

National care standards for early education and childcare up to the age of 16, standard 5: quality of experience, standard 13: improving the service.

This area for improvement was made on 30 November 2016.

Action taken since then

All children had daily opportunities for outdoor play. This was free flow for most playrooms. Children had opportunities to manage risk in the well resourced outdoor play spaces and a wide variety of well utilised loose parts. There were regular visits to local grassed and woodland areas.

This area for improvement has been Met.

Previous area for improvement 2

Involvement of people who use the service in personal plans should be increased. Reviews should be consistent and guide staff to identify what they are next working on, individual to each child's needs. Plans could be used as a way for staff, children and parents to evaluate the service.

National care standards for early education, standard 13: improving the service, standard 14: well-managed service.

This area for improvement was made on 30 November 2016.

Action taken since then

We had full discussions about personal plans. Children and families were involved in reviewing personal plans. The service have plans to review the relevance of some next steps/targets for children with parents and staff to ensure they meet the needs of individual children.

This area for improvement has been Met.

Previous area for improvement 3

Self-evaluation should become systematic, scheduled and continuous and staff should progress to peer assessment.

National care standards for early education, standard 13: improving the service, standard 14: well-managed service.

This area for improvement was made on 30 November 2016.

Action taken since then

Clear records of self-evaluation. Peer assessment has been undertaken and we discussed ways to extend this across all playrooms.

This area for improvement has been Met.

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?	4 - Good
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	4 - Good

How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	5 - Very Good

How good is our staff team?	4 - Good
4.3 Staff deployment	4 - Good

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