The Community School of Auchterarder
Day Care of Children

New School Lane
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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
5 June 2023

Service provided by:
Perth & Kinross Council

Service provider number:
SP2003003370

Service no:
CS2003016091

About the service

The Community School of Auchterarder is a day care of children service which operates from within a spacious purpose-built building within The Community School of Auchterarder Campus and is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 80 children, aged 2 years to those not yet attending primary school.

Nursery children are cared for in a large open plan space that has direct access to a large secure outdoor area. Children benefit from shared facilities across the community campus.
The service is provided by Perth and Kinross Council.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 31 May and 1 June 2023. 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 12 people using the service and eight of their family members
- spoke with 13 staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

Key messages

Calm, warm and positive interactions by staff contribute to children felling happy, safe and secure.

The nursery management team had taken significant steps to embed a strong sense of commitment to continuous service development. Nursery children, their families and staff were meaningfully involved as key partners in the service and their views were valued and listened to.

Children that require additional help are supported effectively through appropriate strategies and positive working relationships with families and other professionals.

Staff used Makaton signs consistently to promote children's communication and language development and this was naturally embedded into children's experiences.

Leaders were visible and worked collaboratively with families and the staff team to improve outcomes.

To keep children safe and healthy, some improvements were needed to ensure that children experience an environment that is always safe and clean.

Children had dedicated time each day to spend with their key worker which contributed to the positive relationships and children's strong attachments to staff.

The service should continue to monitor how staff are deployed effectively throughout the day to ensure all children are receiving consistent care and support.

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?	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? 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 benefitted from nurturing, responsive and compassionate care. Staff were kind and warm in their approach and caring interactions supported children to feel loved and safe. Staff understood the value of positive attachments, for example, they got down to children's level and offered cuddles and support in a calm and sensitive manner. There was a strong focus on Makaton signing which was naturally woven into daily experiences, for example, we heard children ask staff to sign words, such as 'apple and yellow'. Additionally, children and their families could learn Makaton together at home as the service shared regular videos of signs on an online digital platform. A nursery mantra was used by staff and children during their play and the 'Be kind, be safe, have fun' approach was impacting positively on relationships across the service.

Staff knew children and their families well. They effectively used an online platform if they needed to communicate with families throughout the nursery day. However, at pick up times we found information shared was not informative on how their child's time at nursery had been. Some parents told us they did not feel they were given good quality information about their child's daily experiences. While we understood the reasons why these transitions were undertaken quickly, it is important that daily information is shared in an effective way for all children. We discussed with the service ways in which this could be improved and before the inspection was concluded they were considering ways in which to provide families with more meaningful information at these times.

Most children had an effective personal plan in place to support their needs and wellbeing. Additionally, an informative overview sheet supported staff with how to support children that required additional help. However, some children's plans did not contain important information about their needs and preferences and some required more detail on how children could be supported to achieve their full potential. Following our suggestions personal plans were reviewed before the inspection was concluded. We were satisfied future monitoring of personal plans by the nursery management team would ensure gaps were identified and acted upon.

The nursery management team and staff supported children who required additional support very well. They were proactive at identifying what additional help was required through effective partnership working with families. They recognised and built on children's strengths by working positively with other to implement meaningful individualised programmes. This enabled children to feel safe and secure and be fully included in nursery routines and families assured that their children's needs were being met.

Older children were settled within the playroom and leading their own play and learning. They enthusiastically showed us round their nursery and confidently moved between play spaces and the outdoor area. Younger children did not always receive consistent care and support throughout their sessions and at times were wandering around the large open plan playroom with limited interactions from staff. The room dedicated to their care was being used for other purposes at the time of inspection. We discussed this with the nursery management team who were responsive to our suggestions. On our second visit staff had created an area within the playroom for the younger children which would positively impact on their care, support and overall wellbeing.

Mealtimes were unhurried and sociable which supported positive attachments as staff sat and some ate with children promoting healthy eating and manners. They encouraged children to try foods and we saw children enjoyed their lunchtime experience as they happily chatted to their peers. These experiences provided some opportunities for responsibility, independence and self-help skills, for example, children were involved in the planning of their meals. They chose where to sit, used real cutlery and crockery, poured their own drinks and used tongs to choose from serving dishes in the centre of the table. Further opportunities for responsibility could be promoted by children being included in the preparation of snack, collecting their own cutlery and plates and clearing away their dishes when they had finished their meal. Allergies were well managed and staff were confident in how to respond to a choking episode. This contributed to keeping children safe.

Quality Indicator 1.3: Play and learning

Staff understood the value of play and as a result children were confident, happy and secure within the setting. We observed staff interacting warmly with children as they played, joining in their play when invited or with well-timed interventions. They offered cuddles, support and were responsive to children's requests. Staff engaged with children on a one-to-one basis. They sang, drew pictures and read books together. Children had built positive and caring attachments with staff which contributed positively to their emotional security and enjoyment of play and learning.

We found children engaged in a range of quality play experiences for example, a small group of children were making 'perfume' with various natural materials which they mixed with water. The block play area was well accessed by children who played happily independently or cooperatively in a small group creating structures. We suggested smaller loose parts and interesting objects be added to this area of play so children could complete their creations. The service was responsive to our suggestions and during our second visit we observed children use these materials. One child told us, "Wow, look what I've made with all of this".

Language, literacy and numeracy was very well supported within the indoor environment. Staff used Makaton signs consistently to promote children's communication and language development and this was naturally embedded into children's experiences. Younger children were sensitively supported by staff who used age and stage appropriate language to provide care and promote their interests and curiosities. We heard children confidently talking about numbers and floor books evidenced the skills in early math they were developing. We found most staff were skilled at using effective questioning to support progress within children's mathematical thinking and problem-solving skills. As a result, children were well supported to progress and achieve their potential. There was scope for language, literacy and numeracy opportunities to be further developed within the outdoor environment. The service had identified this as part of their on-going improvement work and opportunities had been enhanced on our second visit.

Planning approaches took account of children's interests. It was evident that children's voices were highly valued and there was a very good balance of planned and child-initiated activities. Children were achieving as approaches to planning were well organised and considered across the service. Children's comments, drawings and ideas were captured within floor books which demonstrated their involvement in the planning process. We found floor books to be of a very high quality and demonstrated the progression and depth of learning children had experienced. We could see children consolidated their learning by revisiting past experiences.

Children's observations of learning were shared with families on an online platform. We found these were focused and individualised. Next steps were age and stage appropriate, measurable and achievable. The service had a very good tracking and monitoring system which meant children were being well supported to achieve their targets in play and learning. This contributed to children reaching their full potential.

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.

Quality Indicator 2.2: Children experience high quality facilities

Children experienced a spacious, bright and well-ventilated playroom. The large open plan playroom was furnished with natural décor which helped to create a calm and relaxing environment. There were some homely and comfortable spaces which enabled children to have spaces to rest and relax. Children made good use of the space available and played together cooperatively in groups. This helped them to build positive relationships with their peers and develop their social skills.

Children had direct access to the nursery garden and moved confidently and freely between the indoor and outdoor spaces. This promoted children's choice and independence in their play. Staff worked well to identify and minimise risks, for example, staff had cordoned off an area in the garden where materials were stored that needed to be disposed of. Despite staff and management's best efforts to have them removed, the provider had not taken any action and the materials had remained in the nursery garden for many months. We observed one child enter the area unsupervised. This was a safety risk to children and had the potential to cause harm (see area for improvement 1).

Older children experienced developmentally appropriate spaces which promoted creativity, imagination and fun. To promote depth and challenge in learning, we suggested that play areas both indoors and outdoors could be enhanced with more loose parts and objects of interest. Staff were responsive to our suggestions and had increased the resources available on the second day of inspection. As a result, children had increased levels of engagement in their play. Children would benefit from additional resources to further enrich their play experiences.

Younger children were not always able to access a separate playroom which had been created for them. This meant that at times, they were not fully engaged and supported in their play within the large playroom. We discussed creating a space within the large playroom specifically for younger children, to ensure they had consistently high-quality interactions, spaces and experiences. Additionally, it would support them to engage in the schematic and sensory experiences that had been planned for them. By the end of the inspection, this space had been created and had a positive impact on their experiences. This dedicated space supported children to feel safe and secure while keeping them connected to their older peers.

Children washed their hands at appropriate times and were encouraged to do this independently. However, on occasions where children were not supervised they did not always use soap or wash their hands effectively. This increased the risk of infection in the event of an outbreak of illness. Resources and areas of the playroom were well maintained and clean which helped to keep children safe. Staff carried out regular checks of the toilets and cleaned them throughout the day. However, external cleaners had responsibility for the overall cleanliness of the toilet facilities. We found that the toilet facilities required upgrading and a deep clean, for example, skirting boards were dirty, areas around the sink were unclean and paint was flaking off the wall. This had the potential to increase the spread of infection. These areas had been identified and shared by staff and management with the provider. To date, the provider has taken no action to address these issues (see area for improvement 1).

The use of CCTV in the nursery entrance was used solely for security purposes. This helped to provide a safe environment. Protection of children's personal information was paramount and was stored safely. These measures helped to keep children safe.

Areas for improvement

1. To keep children safe and healthy, the provider, senior management team and staff should ensure that children experience an environment that is safe and clean.

This should include but is not limited to:

a) review the environment for potential risks and take action to address these, including the removal of unused toys and resources

b) clean areas which are visibly dirty

c) ensure effective hand washing routines are in place

d) implement an effective system to audit the environment and ensure actions identified are appropriately and timeously addressed.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which states that: 'My environment is secure and safe' (HSCS 5.19).

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.

Quality Indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well

Visible Leaders promoted a shared vision for the setting. The strong senior nursery management team provided effective leadership and support to staff. They had formed very positive working relationships and worked effectively together to support an ethos of continuous improvement. School values were celebrated and woven through children's experiences. Children proudly showed us stickers awarded to them from staff linked to the school values. They confidently explained to us how they had been respectful and happy and wore the stickers with pride.

The senior nursery management team had taken significant steps to embed a strong sense of commitment to continuous service development. They were aware that high quality play and learning needs to be at the heart of the service. A realistic improvement plan and robust quality assurance processes were impacting positively on improving outcomes. Staff understood their roles in reviewing and evaluating developments within service provision. This demonstrated their confidence in making the changes that would improve experiences and outcomes for children and their families.

Nursery children, their families and staff were meaningfully involved as key partners in the service and their views were valued and listened to as part of service development. A range of opportunities were provided to gather their views, for example, they contributed to 'The Big Book of Learning, a growth tree in the nursery entrance and a tickled pink and green for growth system' clearly demonstrated how views were responsively acted upon. One parent told us, "We've left feedback on pink and green post it notes, staff quickly act on anything to develop, which shows we're being listened to". We found the comprehensive and inclusive approach to self-evaluation was impacting positively on outcomes. This contributed to the trusting relationships with families and provided a service which met their needs. Families spoke very highly of the whole staff team. They felt they were friendly, helpful and knew their children very well.

Children's transitions were well-considered and a real strength of the service. Families were provided with activities and questions to support their children at home with feelings experienced through transitions, for example, a focus on the story 'The Invisible String' explored the concepts of love, loss and change. This meaningful approach promoted children's emotional security and helped them build on their self-esteem and confidence. Children were prepared very well for their move into Primary one and this approach helped share the vision and promoted the values which were clearly at the centre of the service staff provided.

The senior nursery management team were very responsive to suggestions we made during the inspection to improve outcomes. Most of which had been identified through their own robust self-evaluation and quality assurance processes. We found they were well placed to achieve their ongoing improvement priorities to ensure children and families continue to experience quality care, play and learning.

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.

Quality Indicator 4.3: Staff deployment

Staff were effectively deployed across the setting to take account of their knowledge and skills. Careful consideration was given to the deployment of staff to ensure less experienced staff were supported by staff who were more experienced. New staff were positive about the mentoring and support they received which helped them to meet children's needs effectively.

Children had dedicated time each day to spend with their key worker. This provided continuity of care with a familiar adult and supported children and staff to build strong attachments. Families commented positively on the relationships children had developed with key staff and how they found staff kind and caring. One parent told us, "The key workers seem to genuinely care about the kids".

Children experienced positive interactions with staff during lunch. However, the management of staff breaks impacted on some children's experiences. A few staff had their break during the children's mealtime. This meant that some children did not have a consistent staff member throughout their lunch which impacted on the quality of their experience (see area for improvement 1).

Some children benefitted from additional support from staff which supported them to have positive outcomes. Whilst the service operated within the minimum adult to child ratios, the configuration of the environment, staff absences and vacancies impacted on children's experiences. As a result, at times staff were unable to fully meet all children's preferences and wishes, for example, younger children wandered around the large open plan playroom and were not supported to engage meaningfully in their play (see area for improvement 1).

Staff communicated well throughout the day; however, they did not always move flexibly between the indoor and outdoor spaces as children's play evolved. As staff remained inside in their allocated area, this meant that on a couple of occasions, there was a large number of children playing outdoors with limited staff. Additionally, a few families commented that they did not feel there were enough staff to ensure children were always well supervised. We discussed deployment of staff with the senior nursery management team. They told us they had identified this through their own quality assurance processes and had started to implement improvements (see area for improvement 1).

Areas for improvement

1. Children should always receive quality care and support. The provider should ensure there are sufficient staff to meet all children's needs throughout the day and provide them with consistently high-quality experiences.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS), which state that: 'My needs are met by the right number of people' (HSCS 3.15).

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?	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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