Park Early Learning and Childcare Suite
Day Care of Children

Invergordon Academy
Academy Road
INVERGORDON
IV18 OLD

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
31 May 2023

Service provided by:
Highland Council

Service provider number:
SP2003001693

Service no:
CS2003017254

About the service

Park Early Learning and Childcare Suite is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 40 children aged three years to those attending primary. The service is operated by The Highland Council. The head teacher manages the service, which operates term-time only.

The service is based within the grounds of Invergordon Academy, Invergordon, Ross-shire. The premises consists of a playroom, cloakroom, kitchen and toilets. There is an enclosed outdoor play area which contains a range of loose parts and open ended resources which extend and enrich the children's imaginative play and learning experiences.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 29 and 30 May 2023. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate. We gave feedback to the manager and representatives from the local authority on 30 May 2023.

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 questionnaires from seven families
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Staff knew children very well and were responsive to their individual needs.
- There was improvement to children's play and learning. Children received good quality play experiences which impacted positively on their health and wellbeing.
- Planning processes needed further development.
- Staff interactions had improved significantly. Interactions between staff and children were carefully considered and were respectful of children's rights, wishes and choices.
- There was significant improvement to the setting. The manager and staff team had worked hard to create an attractive and stimulating environment.
- Children benefited from a very good range of open ended, natural child centred resources, enabling them to explore their creativity, imagination and problem solving skills.
- There was a strong commitment and shared responsibility to supporting improvement within the service.
- Since the last inspection, the manager had reviewed staff deployment within the service. This meant that good use was made of staff experience, knowledge, and skills, to ensure children's experiences across their whole day were positive.

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?	5 - Very 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.

1.1 Nurturing care and support

Children experienced warm, caring and nurturing approaches to support their wellbeing. Staff were proactive in supporting children with comfort and reassurance when needed which contributed to children feeling secure in their experience.

Staff knew children very well and were responsive to their individual needs. Staff cuddled and comforted children to support transition and were quick to respond if a child became upset. Staff were very good at following cues from children and recognised when a child needed support. This resulted in strong relationships between children and staff.

Effective personal planning for each child, supported their overall wellbeing. This was carried out in collaboration with families and partners to promote consistency and continuity in care. Staff spoke confidently and knowledgeably about the individual care needs of children and the strategies in place to support them. As a result, all children received well-planned care and support to meet their individual needs.

Snack was a positive, relaxing and sociable time for children. Children were fully involved in the preparation and delivery of snack. For example, children were supported to serve their own food and drinks. This promoted children's independence and skills for life. Staff engaged in conversations with children during their snack experience which encouraged language and communication skills.

Mealtimes had been a key area for improvement within the service. Staff had worked hard to make improvements. Children experienced a calm and sociable lunchtime. They were responsible for collecting their own plates and cutlery, which encouraged some opportunities for independence. Staff sat with children eating which promoted good eating habits, manners and supported a sociable experience. The service should continue to review the lunchtime experience. Consideration should be given to creating a nurturing, family experience.

Parents of children attending the breakfast club identified an area for development in relation to the nutritional content of the breakfast. Children were only offered toast or cereal, some families requested that fruit was also offered. We shared this information with the manager who agreed to take this forward.

Staff worked together to ensure a positive ethos within the service. They had formed trusting and respectful relationships with the families using the service. This was supported through effective communication. Families received a daily overview of their child's day. This provided them with a chance to share comments and feedback.

1.3 Play and learning

There was significant improvement to children's play and learning. All children received good quality play experiences which impacted positively on their health and wellbeing. They were-supported to learn and develop through play. We saw them leading their own play experiences and independently selecting resources of their choice. They engaged meaningfully with the experiences offered to them. As a result, all children presented as happy, confident individuals.

Staff interactions had improved significantly. They understood their role in supporting children's development. Interactions between staff and children were carefully considered and were respectful of children's rights, wishes and choices. Staff confidently scaffolded their learning experiences, supporting their development in language, literacy and numeracy. For example, while playing with blocks, children explored mathematical concepts around shape, measuring and sorting. Children's vocabulary and language development was supported through staff spontaneously singing and sharing stories with children.

All children were able to explore in the garden. This area offered good experiences for children to be imaginative and creative in their explorative play and investigative learning. For example, children in the nursery enjoyed experimenting with water pretending to make a fish pond and creating an ice cream van from a large cardboard box.

Opportunities for risky play were well-supported. Children made good use of the loose parts provided, to create obstacle courses and challenge themselves. Staff used open ended questions to support children to consider how to keep themselves safe when taking risks.

For the majority of the time, children benefited from uninterrupted play. However, before lunchtime, children in the nursery were asked to gather in a large group. This resulted in some children becoming disengaged. To reduce interruptions to children's play, we asked the manager to review some of the arrangements in place.

Planning approaches were mostly based around children's ideas which resulted in staff providing experiences that were child-centred. This impacted positively on children's emotional wellbeing and development. However, there was scope to develop this further to support depth and breadth in children's learning. We also identified the need to strengthen processes for evaluating children's progress and achievements. The service had recognised that they were not able to effectively assess and plan for individual learning and development needs. As a result, children were not yet being fully supported to develop a broad range of lifelong learning skills.

How good is our setting? 5 - Very Good

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

2.2 Children experience high quality facilities

There was significant improvement to the setting. The manager and staff team had worked hard to create an attractive and stimulating environment. As a result, children were offered exciting and developmentally appropriate play spaces, both indoors and outdoors.

The playroom and outdoor garden space were well thought out to maximise children's play and learning experiences. Children benefited from a very good range of open ended, natural child-centred resources, enabling them to explore their creativity, imagination and problem solving skills. For example, children played with everyday items which sustained their interest for prolonged periods of time, contributing to the fun they had while playing and learning.

The indoor playroom was decorated in neutral colours which promoted a natural, calm environment. This fostered a welcoming atmosphere for the children. The addition of homely touches and carefully considered furnishings, supported children to feel valued and gave a strong message that they matter.

Children had opportunities to rest and relax in safe, cosy areas. This enabled children to seek out a calm area where they could have some individual time if needed, supporting children's emotional wellbeing.

The service had reviewed and developed effective systems to keep children safe. Staff communicated well with each other regarding numbers of children and which area they had chosen to play in. Head counts were carried out regularly to support staff to know how many children they were responsible for. As a result, children were accounted for at all times.

How good is our leadership? 5 - Very Good

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

3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well

There was a strong commitment and shared responsibility to supporting improvement within the service. Since the last inspection, extensive and robust quality assurance processes had been developed. As a result, focussed and meaningful systems for the manager and staff to review and monitor various aspects of the service were now in place. This meant that areas for improvement were identified, shared and actions were taken to make positive changes to children's experiences. For example changes to the environment, staff deployment and children's play experiences. This resulted in improved outcomes for children.

Strong leadership resulted in staff who had confidence in their capacity to support children and families to reach their full potential. There was a clear cycle of reflection and improvement within the service. Regular support and supervision sessions provided an opportunity for staff to be clear on their responsibilities and accountable for their role. Staff engaged effectively with the process to reflect and improve their practice, enabling learning to be identified. Staff told us they felt well-supported by the manager. This contributed to everyone feeling confident to initiate well-informed change and take responsibility for the process. As a result, children benefited from improved outcomes and play experiences.

The manager should continue to embed and sustain the good quality practices to ensure children and families continue to experience very good care and support.

How good is our staff team? 5 - Very Good

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

4.3 Staff deployment

Children benefited from a caring and nurturing staff team who knew them well. They recognised that continuity of care was important for children. Since the last inspection, the manager had reviewed staff deployment within the service. This meant that good use was made of staff experience, knowledge and skills to ensure children's experiences across their whole day was positive. Additionally, the right number of staff was meeting children's individual needs, ensuring their safety. Staff were proactive in recognising any gaps and ensuring effective supervision and quality engagement with children. Staff placed themselves thoughtfully during busier times to ensure all children's individual needs were well-considered. As a result, children benefited from a very calm and positive experience.

All staff communicated well and in a respectful manner to ensure children's needs were met consistently across the day. This contributed to children being respected and created a positive team ethos within the service.

Staff provided individualised support by effectively engaging with children throughout the day. Staff demonstrated an awareness of when and how to effectively intervene, picking up on cues to support children's wellbeing and extend their play experiences. This resulted in good quality engagement and interaction.

What the service has done to meet any requirements we made at or since the last inspection

Requirements

Requirement 1

By 17 March 2023, the provider must ensure improved outcomes for children and practice by implementing effective systems of quality assurance.

To do this the provider must, at a minimum, ensure:

a) regular and effective support and supervision for all staff is implemented.
b) staff are supported to develop their knowledge and understanding around self-evaluation processes and are involved in the systematic evaluation of their work and the work of the service.
c) clear and effective plans are in place for maintaining and improving the service.
d) the management team effectively monitors the work of each member of staff and the service as a whole.

This is to comply with the - Regulation 3 Principles and Regulation 15 (a) and (b) Staffing of The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/210).

This requirement was made on 18 January 2023.

Action taken on previous requirement

Since the last inspection, extensive and robust quality assurance processes had been developed. As a result, focussed and meaningful systems for the manager and staff to review and monitor various aspects of the service were now in place. This meant that areas for improvement were identified, shared and actions were taken to make positive changes to children's experiences.

Met - within timescales

Requirement 2

By 17 March 2023, the provider must ensure that children are effectively supported by staff who have the right skills and qualities. They must, as a minimum,

a) review the skill mix of staff across the setting and make changes

b) review and make appropriate changes to staff deployment to improve experiences for children

This is to comply with Regulation 4(1)(a) (Welfare of users) of the Social Care and Social Work and Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulation 2011 (SSI 2011/2010).

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 requirement was made on 18 January 2023.

Action taken on previous requirement

Since the last inspection, the manager had reviewed staff deployment across the service and made changes. This meant that good use was made of staff experience, knowledge and skills to ensure children's experiences across their whole day were positive.

Met - within timescales

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

To enable children to receive high quality play, learning and development opportunities, the manager should ensure staff are responsive to children's individual interests and needs.

This is in order to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that 'As a child, I can direct my own play and activities in the way I choose, and freely access a wide range of experiences and resources for my age and stage, which stimulate my natural curiosity, learning and creativity.' (HSCS 2.27)

This area for improvement was made on 18 January 2023.

Action taken since then

We noted improvement to the quality of play, learning and development opportunities. Children were meaningfully involved in leading their play and learning through a balance of spontaneous and planned experiences that promoted children's choice and independence. Overall, we observed child-centred, responsive play and child led learning scaffolded by staff, who were playful in their interactions with children. This resulted in children who were engaged and engrossed in their play. It also demonstrated that staff were valuing children's interests and supporting their play, learning and development at a pace that was right for them.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

To enable all children to be cared for in an appropriate environment that meets their needs and supports them to reach their full potential, the manager and staff should review the environment. This should include but is not limited to ensuring:

a) all children experience an environment that is welcoming, well furnished, comfortable, and homely.
b) appropriate play spaces are available with suitable resources and materials to effectively challenge children and reflect their current interests and curiosities.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'If I experience care and support in a group, I experience a homely environment and can use a comfortable area with soft furnishings to relax.' (HSCS 5.6)

This area for improvement was made on 18 January 2023.

Action taken since then

Children were cared for in an environment that met their needs. Staff had reviewed the room layout and implemented homely touches. They had increased their range of open ended , natural real life resources indoors. These reflected children's interests and curiosities and supported them to develop their skills in understanding, thinking, investigation and problem solving.

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?	4 - Good
1.1 Nurturing care and support	5 - Very Good
1.3 Play and learning	4 - Good

How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	5 - Very 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?	5 - Very Good
4.3 Staff deployment	5 - Very Good

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