Stramash Outdoor Nursery, Fort William
Day Care of Children

Inverlochy Mains
North Road
Old Inverlochy Castle
Fort William
PH33 6TQ

Telephone: 01631 566 080

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
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Service provided by:
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About the service

The Care Inspectorate regulates care services in Scotland. Information about all care services is available on our website at www.careinspectorate.com.

Stramash Outdoor Nursery, Fort William is a daycare of children service and is registered to provide care to a maximum of 32 children aged from 2 years to include those of an age to attend primary school during term time. The service should not exceed the maximum number of 10 children aged between 2 and 3 years of age at any one time. During school holiday times and inservice days, the care service may be provided to a maximum of 32 children from age 2 to 7 years.

The service operates from their own designated outdoor area within Old Inverlochy Castle, near Fort William. A 'Yurkee' and additional protective structures had been erected on the site for warmth and shelter, along with outdoor toilets, nappy changing facilities and a portacabin for office space.

The provider is Stramash Social Enterprise.

The service's aims include:

'To provide a safe and stimulating environment where children can feel happy and safe, encourage the development of the whole child - emotional, social, physical and intellectual, develop confidence and self esteem, encourage children to explore, appreciate and respect their environment'.

As part of this inspection, we took into consideration Key Question 5 - Operating an early learning and childcare setting (including out of school care and childminders) during Covid-19 with a specific focus on Quality indicator 5.2: Infection prevention and control practices support a safe environment for children and staff. We will report on the overall performance of this indicator in Theme 1 Quality Care and Support.

We check services are meeting the principles of Getting it right for every child (also known as GIRFEC), Scotland's national approach to improving outcomes and wellbeing for children by offering the right help at the right time from the right people. It supports them and their parent(s) to work with the services that can help them. There are eight wellbeing indicators at the heart of Getting it right for every child: safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included (also known as SHANARRI).

What people told us

During our visit we were able to see children freely expressing themselves when playing on their Stramash bikes and enjoying, the challenge, excitement and adventure of being outdoors. Some of their comments included:

'Mine floated to the bridge!' [when taken to river to float their rafts made from wood and willow]

'I like jumping in puddles!'

'We've been growing potatoes and strawberries !'

Twenty parents/carers also contacted us by email to give us their views. They were all very positive about the care and support their child had received during the pandemic and the experiences and opportunities provided for them to grow, flourish and develop. Some of their comments included:

'Every day at Stramash is a new and exciting adventure [for my child]. He/she loves the resident rabbit, Apple, and would happily spend all day cuddling him. The site itself is so well set out, there is an abundance of items that allows the children to explore and learn whilst making it fun as they make their way round. The Yurkie I absolutely love and would happily live in myself if I could! It is a great space for the children to hide away from any bad weather and enjoy indoor activities such as arts & crafts and reading. From starting last year until now the team have worked so hard to improve the site with planting new plants & trees to having the new dry room and electricity installed. What I love most is that the team don't stand still for a second, they are constantly looking for and are passionate about improvement across the site to make it better for the children and the staff. The staffing team at Stramash are brilliant. Every day you are greeted with a smile and lovely chat to start the session. Information about XXX is always communicated well by staff orally, by email and through the Interactive Learning Portal. I credit the fantastic care and patience from all of the team at Stramash to XXX learning and development. I have never met such a positive, inspiring and caring bunch of people who make me smile every day'

'Both my husband and I consider sending our [children] to Stramash to be one of the single best decisions we have made as parents. The staff, the nursery, the family community they have created is incredible. Over the last 2-3 years we have seen the nursery constantly developing and striving to provide a wonderful, supportive, child-centred setting. No matter what challenge (from the devastating fire to the pandemic) they have always taken a positive, caring approach to overcome it. They consult the parents and children on developments and are always improving the setting to make the best possible experience for the children'

'Our [child] returns from Stramash each day with stories about the varied and interesting things he/she has done, both independently and guided, as well as loaded with facts and questions following the structured activities provided by the adults. He/she has also made a wide friendship group with the children and speaks very highly of staff members XXX and XXX. Our [child] is also besotted with Apple, the rabbit! We appreciate the regular feedback we receive from the staff, both orally at the end of each day and through providing pictures and comments of his/her learning journey via ILD. In fact, whenever my wife and I read the written comments we are delighted to note that they are truly reflective of the little [child] we know and not just generic comments provided in a box ticking exercise'

'This year I have been particularly impressed with how detailed the focus summaries have been and appreciate that they are personalised to our [child]. I get the impression they put a lot of time into constructing these and they give me confidence that he/she is being observed and supported individually. The ILD updates are a great way to see what he/she gets up to in between focus summaries. I have felt included as a parent when they have asked for my input to construct learning plans for him/her and was able to share with them observations I had made at home. I enjoyed reading through the story books they constructed of the children working together to move logs. XXX was able to point to his/her friends and it helped give us a starting point for him/her to tell us stories about him/her time in Stramash. I am delighted with the physical space at Stramash, it looks fun to explore and I can see the staff put in a lot of effort to keep it constantly changing and interesting. I am also satisfied the yurt provides a safe, warm, sheltered space when needed. I really like the toilets they have built for the children. On a few occasions I have helped XXX to use the toilet when I go to pick him/her up and I can see how the space is designed in a way that maximises his/her independence. I get the impression XXX receives the support he/she requires at Stramash for toileting while appropriately being enabled to do as much as he/she can independently.

During the pandemic, the management team did a great job keeping us informed at a time when there was a lot of uncertainty which was out with anyone's control. They made good use of social media to keep families connected that were not able to access the centre during the lockdowns. I particularly enjoyed watching some of the Puddle Patter videos and learning from some of the experts in the field. I was satisfied with the adaptations they made to introduce a one way system and additional hand washing stations. I felt very fortunate that Stramash was already set up as an outdoor centre, with staff trained to maximise learning in the outdoor environment at a time when we were all being told it was safer to socialise outdoors'

'We are both really happy with the service provided by Stramash and XXX really loves it and talks about it when he/she returns home. The staff are really helpful and willing to take the time to talk about how XXX is doing emotionally and physically when we pick him/her up as well as providing regular more formal updates. We are particularly happy with the care given to XXX and the relationships between him/her and staff. There has been some big positive changes in the last year or so with new buildings providing shelter and a focus on seasonal changes, including growing and harvesting of fruit and vegetables. We really love the feeling of community at Stramash and this is the only nursery that we would send our children to'

My eldest [child] is quite safety conscious yet he/she has flourished in the setting with the freedom to develop his/her confidence playing with all the different toys and equipment and structures. My youngest [child] has flourished in a completely different way, where he/she has the freedom and space to play and find his/her own limits, with the caring supervision of the team. They both have developed incredible imaginations and are able to make games using the simplest of props... without a screen in sight. Each member of the team knows my [children] so well, and this is abundantly clear in their feedback. They provide regular updates verbally and through ILD. The focus weeks are also fantastic for getting insight into what they've been learning. I always look forward to hearing the anecdotes from their days. The way the staff talk about my [children] means I know how well they are cared for there. The care during the pandemic has been so reassuring... with the team posting videos reading stories during lockdown to keep the children engaged and updates on the various structural changes. [The manager] in particular goes to huge lengths to make sure parents are involved and our voices are heard through different parent evenings, posts on the group to surveys and emails. His vision and passion are contagious'

'I must admit that I was little bit reserved about outdoor nursery especially because of the age of my [child] and nonstop rainy weather in Fort William. The communication with [the manager and staff] has been amazing and very efficient since day one. Stramash was the best choice and I am very proud to be part of the Stramash community. [Staff] are so lovely and it is such a pleasure to have a wee chat when I pick XXX up. I also love these reports and pictures [staff] puts on parental portal. Finally my [child] he/she loves it there, every time it is a big adventure. He/she loves watering plants, jumps in the puddles, plays with mud. The transition was very smooth and because of the outside environment he/she never cried when I was leaving. Stramash will be our first choice next year when XXX attends full time'

'The development in XXX since attending has been fantastic, not only at an academic level but also personal. Being there has taught him/her to understand his/her body and feelings so much more, from being too hot/cold and so putting on layers or taking off, knowing the importance of wearing the right clothing for the day e.g. raincoat etc. But also his/her social development, he/she is polite to everyone in the street, if he/she sees rubbish on the floor he/she picks it up and takes it to a bin. Stramash have played a massive part in getting XXX to this stage. Lets not forget though he/she is still learning academically all the time, from learning to count higher, learning letters and words, music and the list goes on. The staff are very informative and everyday give you a brief run through of the day, what has happened, what they have been doing and so on. I also believe if it wasn't for the help with things like toilet training XXX wouldn't be in the position he/she is now. I can't fault Stramash at all and both myself and wife are

extremely happy with the nursery, even the sense of community that has built between other parents it is fantastic and like no other nursery. Stramash really has given him/her the best start in life we could of wished for'

'The staff at Stramash are such a lovely bunch. They seem to have a great mixture of younger staff and more experienced practitioners which I think is good for the children. XXX talks a lot about what he/she does at nursery, and has never had a bad word to say about the place. I am a big fan of their learning through play attitude. I can honestly say that XXX has taken leaps forward with his/her problem solving skills and his/her ability to socialise. I firmly believe that having the space and freedom to choose from such a variety of play environments has helped his/her physical strength and his/her confidence in the capability of his/her own body. He/she has also not been unwell since starting nursery, again I put this down to the fact the children are outside so much! Growing fruit and vegetables is an amazing thing to do at a nursery and I know XXX loves this too. Stramash have clearly put a lot of thought into maximising the potential learning opportunities from the space they have, with a variety of interesting zones and huge variation in toys and things for the children to play with. Growing fruit etc is a great project for the children to follow throughout the year and I really think it helps them with their concept of time as it provides a memorable chain of events connected with seasons i.e. planting the seed in spring to harvesting the crops in autumn. I particularly like the way they try to actually involve the children in the development of the nursery, having them help "design" areas of play and involving them in putting them together. I am very excited that they are in the process of installing electricity and their new hut is a great space for shelter from the weather. The staff are approachable, pleasant and appear genuinely empathetic to the individual needs of each child. They are not afraid to physically comfort XXX when he/she needs it, which is a huge reassurance for a parent who is leaving their child in someone else's care for several days a week'

'The site itself is fantastic, a real adventure playground full of opportunities for XXX and his/her friends to learn and discover. One morning he/she was engrossed in making a mud house for a slug, another time he/she and a friend made a den in a bush. He/she points out plants and birds he/she has encountered there, and one morning got the chance to cuddle a baby rabbit that had been found under a pallet (and has since been adopted as a nursery pet!).
[The manager] is a real enthusiast, always working on projects to improve the space and facilities and to go above and beyond what is expected. He radiates warmth and respect for the kids, and his enthusiasm is infectious in both the parents and other staff. The children get the chance to dig, sow seeds, look after plants, harvest fruit and veg, then cook and eat the produce. They also get out and about, on little walks and adventures locally. And it has been a haven during Covid, a healthy and welcoming outdoor space, with clear procedures in place to keep everyone safe'.

Self assessment

We did not ask the service to complete a self assessment in advance of this inspection. We did look at the service's improvement plan which had identified appropriate priorities for improvement.

From this inspection we graded this service as:

Quality of care and support	5 - Very Good
Quality of environment	5 - Very Good
Quality of staffing	5 - Very Good
Quality of management and leadership	5 - Very Good

Quality of care and support

Findings from the inspection

The service had made very good progress in relation to this theme.

Staff were warm, caring and nurturing towards children and were taking the time to know them very well. They engaged skilfully with them to comfort, reassure and support their play, encouraging them to share, follow their own interests and promote friendships. They were taking an individualised approach to children's wellbeing, closely observing and supporting them to adapt to changes and settle in, helping them to shape their play and express their feelings and emotions through a range of creative activities and imaginative play. Staff had developed trusted and loving relationships with children to nurture and help them feel valued, safe and secure. On our visit we were able to see children happy, relaxed and having fun.

As highlighted from the last inspection, to support children's wellbeing, development needs and progress, their emerging and changing needs were now being fully taken into account as part of their personal plan. For example, transition plans were being tailored to children's individual needs and flexible to respond to any additional support that may be needed. Through their online Interactive Learning Diaries and focussed summaries they were refining how they reported and recorded on children's progress and had strengthened their links with home. Plans were being reviewed and updated as children's needs, challenges and achievements changed to enable staff to provide warm, nurturing and responsive care.

The manager and staff understood and spoke knowledgeably about the impact and challenges children and their families had encountered during lockdown. Through regular meaningful contact with parents and continuing to work collaboratively with other professionals and relevant agencies, they had helped to reduce the impact of any changes on children's experiences and outcomes.

As an outdoor nursery children were able to freely connect with nature, enjoy the fresh air and play with a wide range of natural resources and loose parts play. These experiences provided children with the opportunities to develop their independence, be adventurous and enhance their sense of wellbeing. For example, during our visit we were able to see children excited and having fun on their balance bikes, climbing and playing on beams that they had constructed from wooden logs and planks, as well as experimenting in their mud kitchen and demonstrating how to carefully approach 'Apple' the rabbit they had rescued. We were also able to see everyone enjoying a positive, homely experience at lunch time chatting and sitting with their friends in the Yurkee.

We were satisfied infection prevention and control practices supported a safe environment for children and staff. For example, they had clear protocols in place for visitors when they arrived at the setting. Attention was being paid to handwashing and the careful selection and rotation of resources, as well as physical distancing between staff and other adults. They knew the importance of venting and refreshing the air in the Yurkee when not in use.

At present, the service was not routinely wiping down lunch boxes before mealtimes, however the manager confirmed they were currently reviewing their practice in relation to this to further minimise the risk of infection and cross contamination.

Staff demonstrated a clear understanding of their responsibilities to protect children from harm. They had recently undertaken refresher training in child protection, knew what to do should they have any concerns and who to pass the information onto.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 0

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 0

Grade: 5 - very good

Quality of environment

Findings from the inspection

The service had made very good progress in relation to this theme.

Also see comments under theme 1 and the 'What people told us' section of this report.

Since the last inspection they had completed work on a new entrance area and created pathways to connect and enable children to freely access the site. Planting had enhanced children's experiences with hedges and willow providing wind breaks and interesting new spaces for children to explore and develop their problem solving and high order thinking skills. As highlighted at the last inspection, a new open fronted shed with benches and tables had been built for children to play in and to provide additional shelter from the weather when needed. The section of the roof in the Yurkee designed to let in light had also been repaired creating a more cosy nurturing space for children to play and rest in. Children's needs, views and ideas had been fully taken into account in the development and design of the site. For example, establishing a dedicated area for growing their flowers, fruit and vegetables, paths to ride their bikes and a covered storage area for them to easily access their loose parts play. The installation of a drying room and electricity to the site was also nearing completion.

Regularly reviewing risk assessments including their Covid-19 risk assessment continued to be a dynamic process and updated to reflect the most recent changes to Scottish Government guidance.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 0

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 0

Grade: 5 - very good

Quality of staffing

Findings from the inspection

The service had made very good progress in relation to this theme.

Also see comments under theme 1 and 2 and the 'What people told us' section of this report.

They were a well motivated, enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff team who were clear about their roles and responsibilities. A positive ethos of mutual trust and respect promoted a happy, secure and supportive environment for children and their families.

As identified from the last inspection, a programme of staff support, supervision and development had been put in place to build capacity within the team and support continuous improvement. For example, they were implementing the Scottish Government National Induction Resource, had training plans in place to support staff individual interests and development needs, as well as supervision sessions and regular team meetings for staff to self evaluate, critically reflect on their work and the impact and quality of any training.

Staff told us that they felt connected and committed to their work. They were well supported by the management team and felt valued, respected and safe at work.

Staff had participated in a range of training activities relating to Covid-19 and demonstrated a sound knowledge of infection prevention and control procedures. For example, their enhanced cleaning and hygiene programme was not impacting on the engagement children received or the breadth of activities available.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 0

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 0

Grade: 5 - very good

Quality of management and leadership

Findings from the inspection

The service had made very good progress in relation to this theme.

Since the last inspection they had met the requirement we made in relation to safer recruitment and addressed the four areas for improvement we identified in relation to personal plans, places of shelter, staff support and development and quality assurance.

Also see comments under theme 1, 2 and 3 and the 'What people told us' section of this report.

The improvement work undertaken was evident onsite, through discussion with staff and also from the feedback we received from parents.

The provider, management and staff demonstrated a strong capacity for improvement. They were outcome focussed, committed to the ongoing improvement and development of the service and the maintaining of high standards. It was evident robust and systematic quality assurance processes and procedures were being implemented and embedded to monitor and evaluate all aspects of their service delivery. For example, they had submitted a comprehensive action plan to us following the last inspection, introduced a programme of provider quality assurance audits, as well as involving and regularly gathering feedback from children and their families to review and update their improvement plan. Improvement planning was linked to relevant guidance and the health and social care standards.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 0

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 0

Grade: 5 - very good

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

Previous requirements

Requirement 1

By 30 April 2020 the service provider must demonstrate to the Care Inspectorate that they have robust safer recruitment policies and procedures embedded into their practice that follow and are in line with current legislation on protecting vulnerable groups. The provider should refer to the updated guidance 'Safer Recruitment through Better Recruitment'.

This ensures management and leadership is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state:

4.24 I am confident that people who support and care for me have been appropriately and safely recruited.

4.23 I use a service and organisation that are well led and managed.

4.19 I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes.

4.11 I experience high quality care and support based on relevant evidence, guidance and best practice.

This is in order to comply with The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011. SSI 2011/210, Regulation 9(1)(2) Fitness of employees and Regulation 13(1) Protection of vulnerable groups listings.

This requirement was made on 30 September 2020.

Action taken on previous requirement
As detailed in their action plan submitted on 02 March 2020, the service had updated their safer recruitment policies and procedures in line with current legislation and guidance. They had developed a safer recruitment checklist to strengthen and make sure procedures were being correctly followed and implemented.

As part of this inspection we carried out a safer recruitment audit and were satisfied more robust processes and procedures were in place. We discussed how their recently introduced provider quality assurance audits could be used to support and further embed good practice.

Met - within timescales

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

Previous recommendations

Recommendation 1

Children's personal plans should be further developed and consolidated to support their wellbeing, development needs and progress. Plans should be reviewed and updated as children's needs, challenges and achievements change to enable staff to provide warm, nurturing and responsive care.

This is to demonstrate the Health and Social Care Standards, My support, my life, which state:

1.15 My personal plan (sometimes referred to as a care plan) is right for me because it sets out how my needs will be met, as well as my wishes and choices.

1.19 My care and support meets my needs and is right for me.

1.23 My needs, as agreed in my personal plan, are fully met, and my wishes and choices are respected.

This recommendation was made on 30 September 2020.

Action taken on previous recommendation
See progress under the care and support theme of this report.

Recommendation 2

There should be more cosy, nurturing protective structures and spaces available for children to sleep and rest comfortably when shelter from the weather is needed.

This is to demonstrate the Health and Social Care Standards, My support, my life, which state:

5.20 I have enough physical space to meet my needs and wishes.

5.21 I am able to access a range of good quality equipment and furnishings to meet my needs, wishes and choices.

4.11 I experience high quality care and support based on relevant evidence, guidance and best practice.

This recommendation was made on 30 September 2020.

Action taken on previous recommendation

See progress under the environment theme of this report.

Recommendation 3

A programme of staff support, supervision and development should be implemented that includes more formal observations of their practice, audits of their training needs, as well as a comprehensive induction programme and opportunities for them to self evaluate and critically reflect on their work. This is to build capacity within the team and support continuous improvement.

This is to demonstrate the Health and Social Care Standards, My support, my life, which state:

3.14 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.

4.11 I experience high quality care and support based on relevant evidence, guidance and best practice.

This recommendation was made on 30 September 2020.

Action taken on previous recommendation

See progress under the staffing theme of this report.

Recommendation 4

The provider, management and staff should develop and implement robust and systematic quality assurance processes and procedures to monitor and evaluate all aspects of their service delivery. The Health and Social Care Standards My support, my life should be included and embedded as part of the framework along with other relevant evaluation documents, resources and good practice guidance.

This is to demonstrate the Health and Social Care Standards, My support, my life, which state:

4.23 I use a service and organisation that are well led and managed.

4.19 I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes.

4.11 I experience high quality care and support based on relevant evidence, guidance and best practice.

This recommendation was made on 30 September 2020.

Action taken on previous recommendation

See progress under the management and leadership theme of this report.

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.com.

Enforcement

No enforcement action has been taken against this care service since the last inspection.

Inspection and grading history

Date	Type	Gradings	
31 Jan 2020	Unannounced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	3 - Adequate 3 - Adequate 3 - Adequate 3 - Adequate
15 Nov 2017	Unannounced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	4 - Good 4 - Good Not assessed Not assessed
21 Aug 2015	Unannounced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	4 - Good 4 - Good 4 - Good 4 - Good

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