Stonelaw Preschool Group
Day Care of Children

Stonelaw Church of Scotland
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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
2 February 2024

Service provided by:
Stonelaw Preschool Group

Service provider number:
SP2014012287

Service no:
CS2014325167

About the service

Stonelaw Preschool Group is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 24 children aged from three years to those not yet attending primary school at any one time. The service is in partnership with South Lanarkshire Council to provide early learning and childcare.

The service operates from accommodation within Stonelaw Church in the Rutherglen area of South Lanarkshire. It is located close to local amenities including parks, shops and schools. Children attending the nursery have access to a large hall, two playrooms, toilets and a secure outdoor area, which offers them the opportunity for active play in the fresh air.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Wednesday 31 January 2024 between 08:45 and 15:30. We concluded the inspection on Friday 2 February 2024, when we also gave inspection feedback to the manager and a representative of the service provider. A quality improvement adviser from South Lanarkshire Council was also present. The inspection was carried out by one inspector from the Care Inspectorate. To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included previous inspection findings, registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with children and reviewed 14 survey responses on the quality of the setting from parents whose children attend the service
- spoke with the manager and staff team. We also received five survey responses from staff
- observed practice and staff interactions with children
- reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Children experienced warm, nurturing care from responsive staff, which helped them feel secure, safe and loved.
- Children were leading their play and becoming independent learners due to the play spaces and resources, which had been carefully planned by staff.
- Children benefitted from access to high quality facilities, including various opportunities to explore the local community.
- Staff had a positive team ethos and were respectful in their interactions with each other, children and families. This contributed to everyone feeling included within the setting.
- The manager should continue to support staff to develop leadership roles, so that everyone takes ownership of the service improvement journey.

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

Further details on the particular areas inspected are provided at the end of this report.

How good is our care, play and learning? 5 - Very Good

We evaluated this key question as very good. We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children.

Quality Indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support.
Children experienced warm, nurturing care from responsive staff, which contributed to them feeling secure, safe and loved. Keyworker groups helped children to form attachments with a trusted adult, which supported their emotional wellbeing. Staff conversations with parents at children's drop off and pick up times were friendly and respectful. This made it more likely that parents would feel comfortable to share information about their child with staff or raise any concerns about their care. Parents mainly, strongly agreed that staff knew their child well, including what they liked and what was important for their care. Parents' comments about support for their children included, "My child feels valued and cared for by staff" and "My child is a very fussy eater and staff have always been so accommodating to provide snacks for my child, even some suggested oaty bars which seem to be a hit at home. I have even had some lovely updates sent when my child tries something new. If my child is ever unsettled when arriving to nursery, the staff take the extra time to provide cuddles, nurture and attention to him."

Staff gathered information about children in the different parts of their personal plans, which helped support children's individual needs and track their care, learning and development. In this way staff could introduce challenge to support children to achieve their best. We saw that staff were using the wellbeing indicators from 'Getting it right for every child' (GIRFEC) to identify where children needed additional measures to support their health, welfare and safety. GIRFEC is the Scottish Government's approach to improving outcomes and supporting the wellbeing of children through offering the right help at the right time from the right people.

Familiar routines contributed to children's emotional security. For example, children experienced relaxed and homely mealtimes, where they decided when to eat so that it did not interrupt their play. Children were able to eat when they were hungry and enjoy meals at a pace that was right for them. Children received appropriate levels of support when needed by staff and their independence skills were promoted. Staff took the opportunity to involve children in a variety of discussions promoting their language and communication skills. Practice could be improved if staff more consistently sat with children during these times to model expected behaviours and life skills. Children's individual water bottles were stored at the 'hydration station' so that children could easily access a drink throughout the day, and keep themselves hydrated.

Children's safety and wellbeing was ensured by a clear and concise child protection policy. Staff participated in annual child protection training and were aware of their responsibilities in safeguarding children. This meant they were well prepared to address any concerns they had for children's welfare. Staff were familiar with the Care Inspectorate's safety campaign, 'Keeping Children Safe - Look, Think, Act' (SIMOA) but agreed it would be beneficial to share some of the key messages with children, so that they were learning about personal safety. The SIMOA campaign helps keep children safe by raising awareness of how, and why, they could leave a childcare setting without a responsible adult.

Quality Indicator 1.3: Play and learning.
Children were engaged in play activities of their choice, developing their imagination and problem solving skills. Staff had carefully planned children's play spaces and resources to stimulate children's interest and independent learning. For example loose parts, dressing up clothes, construction toys, books and sensory

materials such as sand, water, mud and foam. 'Loose parts' are materials with no fixed purpose that can be moved and manipulated by children as they try out their play ideas and explore different textures.

'In the moment planning' was being utilised by staff to make sure children experienced a balance of spontaneous and planned activities, with an emphasis on children leading their own play and learning. Staff used conversations and mind maps to take account of children's interests and plan for activities that would motivate them to be curious about learning more. We listened as children told staff what they would like included in an observation for their learning journal, so that their parents would read about their achievements. This empowered children to have confidence in their ideas and self worth. We noted that staff used individual trackers, based on the early level of the Curriculum for Excellence, to demonstrate how children were progressing and to support them to reach their full potential.

Staff were responsive to children's invitations to play and knew intuitively when to step in, using effective questioning to scaffold their learning or resolve conflict. For example, we observed two children experimenting with a car track and bridge they had constructed from cardboard rolls, wood offcuts and a ruler. The member of staff present introduced mathematical language naturally when supporting children's play and analytical skills. They encouraged the children to let others join their play, praising them for being inclusive and communicating the rules they had invented for their game.

Children's literacy was supported in a similar natural way. Self registration using photographs and other visual prompts around the setting introduced children to print and encouraged word recognition. Children enjoyed changing the words to familiar songs and playing matching board games with their friends to have fun with language and its meaning.

Parents were invited to share in their child's play and learning through home link bags and by participating in stay and play sessions. In our survey, parents mainly, strongly agreed that they were fully involved and informed about their child's learning and development. Parents appreciated the breadth of experience offered to their children, one commented, "The staff do a great job of providing a varied selection of books, games, toys and activities for the children. I like that they regularly bring in natural materials for the kids to craft with, and that they have an outdoor play area to enjoy as well as access to the local park. I feel like they offer a good balance of active outdoor play with other indoor activities."

In addition to play based learning opportunities within the setting, staff made very good use of community amenities to develop children's sense of belonging and citizenship. For example, children were learning about growing food and the life cycle at a local allotment. They also visited a care home where they joined residents in intergenerational literacy activities using the Book Bug programme.

How good is our setting? 4 - Good

Quality Indicator 2.2: Children experience high quality facilities.
We made an evaluation of good for this key question, as several important strengths, taken together, clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

The whole setting was bright and well ventilated with good quality child sized furniture and equipment. There were cosy areas with soft furnishings both in the playrooms and outdoor area where children could relax and take time to self regulate their emotions. This gave children a clear message that they were welcome and that their comfort was important. Free flow between the two playrooms gave scope for children to choose between individual play, or small group activities and gatherings. There was a good balance of natural and manufactured resources that were labelled to be easily selected by children as they

followed their play ideas. In this way staff were empowering children to be responsible for their own learning, and to achieve.

In addition to the two playrooms, children had access to a large hall where they could participate in more active energetic play. For example, we observed a small group of children initiating a game of hide and seek but, when staff explained there was not enough space in the play room to run around safely, they agreed that the large hall would be a safer and more fun place to play. There was no free flow access to outdoors from the playrooms but staff communicated well with children to let them know when they were able to go out. Staff were also attuned to children's spontaneous requests to play outdoors and arranged this when possible. Children were clearly accustomed to transporting resources outside to follow their play intentions. They knew where to find additional resources in the shed to further support their play. The setting provided individually labelled puddle suits so that children could play comfortably outdoors in all weathers. We were impressed that children and adults could identify which welly boots belonged to each child through matching photos of the boots on a laminated poster. Giving children opportunities to recognise the correct labels for their actions and for objects, introduces early literacy by connecting words with items.

There were respectful relationships with other tenants in the building. Staff were aware of the infection prevention and control measures needed, when using a shared space. They understood their responsibilities for cleaning within the setting and this practice supported the health and safety of everyone. We observed that staff were diligent about modelling effective hand washing at appropriate times throughout the day and gently supported children to undertake this task for themselves. This meant children were learning to take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing.

The church was the landlord and responsible for the maintenance of the building and we could see that repairs were completed in a timely fashion. Risk assessments were completed for inside and outside the setting, including for trips to the wider community. These demonstrated that the manager and staff team worked well together to identify and remove hazards in the way of children's safety. Children's personal information was stored securely to ensure families' privacy. Information was accessible to relevant staff whilst remaining confidential. It highlighted the service commitment to understanding and following guidelines on data protection.

How good is our leadership? 4 - Good

We evaluated this key question as good, as several important strengths, taken together, clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality Indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well.
This was the first inspection of the setting under the leadership of the current manager, who had implemented a range of robust quality assurance systems to ensure that staff, children and families benefited from a high quality service. The service was in partnership with South Lanarkshire Council and therefore had access to their improvement plan templates and quality improvement officer support.

Over a significant period the service had experienced several managers with different styles of leadership. However, as the current manager had been in post for two years, there was now a more settled and motivated team. Staff participated in annual appraisals and had an open door to support from the manager, which meant they were able to discuss their practice and professional development as well as personal issues. We asked the service provider to consider how the professional development and wellbeing of the manager could be better supported. In our survey, staff mainly strongly agreed that quality assurance systems impacted positively on outcomes for children and all strongly agreed that leaders in the setting

asked for their opinion on how the setting could improve. Their comments included, "Over the last few years we have had several changes in management, and this has proved unsettling for the staff working in the nursery. I personally feel confident that our current manager is working with us to develop a clear vision for the future of our nursery and, going forward, she will use the different strengths we bring to improve the overall learning experiences we offer to our children."

The improvement plan was informed by self evaluation, which aimed to offer high quality care and support tailored to the needs of children and families. We could see that the approach of the staff team was to follow an improvement cycle to reflect on how they were doing and what could be better. Self evaluation was underpinned by national policy and guidelines, including the Health and Social Care Standards. We encouraged the manager to use the cycle to help identify where staff could take on leadership of specified areas of work within the improvement plan. This would give staff confidence to initiate well-informed change and feel a sense of ownership of the improvement journey. We discussed using the challenge questions from 'Realising the Ambition - Being Me' together with SSSC's leadership learning pathway to help with this task. Realising the Ambition is the Scottish Government's national practice guidance on early learning and childcare. It supports staff in professional reflection so that outcomes for children can be measured and improved. The Scottish Social Service Council (SSSC) is responsible for registering people who work in social services and regulating their education and training. (See area for improvement 1.)

The service was run by a parent led Board and all parents were welcome to attend the annual general meeting so that they could participate in the decision making process. Developing the engagement of parents in the life of the setting was one of the improvement priorities and staff had already evaluated the impact of 'stay and play' sessions, to take account of parents' preferences for these and other home link strategies. Results of questionnaires and related actions were displayed and shared so that parents could feel their opinions were valued and respected. The majority of parents we surveyed were confident that the setting was well managed and strongly agreed that their family were meaningfully involved in developing the setting. They believed their ideas and suggestions were used to influence change. Their comments included, "The nursery's manager has been here for a little over a year now and she's been doing a fantastic job of providing an engaging service for the children. There's always something new going on and the staff seem really positive about her leadership. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend Stonelaw to other parents" and "The manager is excellent and I am confident in her ability to run the nursery effectively."

The manager and staff engaged well during the inspection process, providing additional evidence and taking on advice and support, which demonstrated their commitment to continued improvement.

Areas for improvement

1. Staff should be supported by management to identify clearer leadership roles, so that everyone takes ownership of the service improvement journey. Staff should access Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) 'Step into Leadership' resource to promote professional reflection. Developing leadership skills will help staff support positive outcomes for children.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes' (HSCS 4.19).

How good is our staff team? 5 - Very Good

Quality Indicator 4.3: Staff deployment.
We evaluated this key question as very good. We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children.

The service provider's safe recruitment, including induction processes had been updated to take account of good practice guidance, therefore ensuring children were cared for by staff who were fit to work with them. The service was appropriately staffed to meet ratios and the individual needs of children.

Staff had a positive team ethos and were respectful in their interactions with each other, children and families. We could see that staff were committed to a child centred approach within their practice. This contributed to everyone feeling included within the setting. Staff we spoke with were positive about the support provided by the manager. Valuing staff had contributed to a motivated team who had the potential to impact positively on children's lives as they developed and learned.

In our survey, all staff strongly agreed that they were deployed to make the best use of their skills and expertise, they saw their team as a strength with comments including, "The staff team- the team is very supportive towards each other, everyone communicates very well, shares ideas, suggests ideas. We have time at the end of the day to talk and share our concerns about various subjects. We also have a staff meeting once a week which is beneficial."

Staff told us that they had plenty of opportunities to talk about their practice during their working day and within staff meetings. We discussed how this could be strengthened through peer evaluation, which would help staff reflect on their practice, consider their individual strengths or where their practice could be improved.

Debriefings each day kept staff up to date with operational information, as well as time to discuss children's specific interests and needs. Staff were vigilant of children's whereabouts at all times and used a register to record when children entered and left the setting. Daily tasks and staff breaks were managed very well to ensure children's needs were met and that they were safe. Staff understood the importance of continuity for children, and they communicated well with each other when tasks meant they had to move away from play areas. This meant children received consistent care and support from staff who knew them well. We particularly liked that staff made a point of telling children when they were leaving for lunch, reassuring them about the familiar adults who would still be caring for them in their absence. This contributed to children feeling safe and respected.

Photos and mini biographies of each member of the staff team were displayed in the hallway, so that families could get to know their child's keyworker and build relationships with the staff team. Parents responding to our survey mostly strongly agreed that the setting had enough staff with the appropriate skills to support their children. Their comments included, "The ratio of staff to children is such that each child gets a lot of one-on-one time with their teacher if they want it. The staff genuinely bond with the children and care for them and I'm always impressed by how kind and thoughtful they are" and "Staff are always spread evenly across the setting giving the children the choice to play wherever they please."

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

Information from personal plans should feature in planning records for children's learning and development.

This area for improvement was made on 2 November 2017.

Action taken since then

The consistency of staff observations of children and how these were being recorded within children's online learning journals were monitored by the manager. A separate form was used to track children's learning over key curricular areas. Children's individual learning and progress was shared with parents on a termly basis.

This area for improvement had been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

Children should have access to resources that encourage imaginative, explorative and challenging play. Including but not limited to:
- Additional natural resources indoors
- Increase the number of the same type of equipment ie blocks
- Resources for specific support needs ie communication cards
- Regular access to S.T.E.M experiences.

This area for improvement was made on 2 November 2017.

Action taken since then

Toys, games and resources were stored in labelled boxes that were easily identifiable and accessible by children. There were plenty of loose parts both indoors and in outside play areas, and we observed how children were using these to support their play ideas.

The manager showed us examples of where strategies shared by the speech and language therapist had been implemented to support children's communication. These communication strategies had been beneficial during the previous term when a large proportion of children attending the setting had English as their second language.

One member of staff had a particular interest in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) and had participated in training for more ideas of how to embed STEM activities in everyday practice. They had shared this learning with colleagues in the team so that their was consistency in their planning of experiences, that encouraged children to raise questions and explore their interests.

This area for improvement had been met.

Previous area for improvement 3

Training that staff attend should have an impact on the experiences that are provided for children. Staff have a responsibility to ensure their knowledge and practice is in line with best practice guidelines.

This area for improvement was made on 2 November 2017.

Action taken since then

Staff enthusiastically shared examples of their recent professional reading and specific training topics that they had enjoyed including loose parts play, forest schools and STEM.

We observed how staff learning had influenced the organisation of spaces and resources to spark children's creativity and curiosities. Staff individual strengths and interests were loosely linked to 'champion' roles. Making these more explicit would help focus their continued professional development and shared learning.

We encouraged continued use of the Care Inspectorate HUB and Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) resources to promote professional reflection. This will help staff support positive outcomes for children.

This area for improvement had been met.

Previous area for improvement 4

Consideration should be given to staff accessing the Steps into Leadership learning resource by the SSSC to improve and develop their existing skills and improve the quality of information being recorded.

This area for improvement was made on 2 November 2017.

Action taken since then

The new manager had been building the capacity of the team to support a programme of continuous improvement across the setting. Modelling strong leadership and providing tools for recording, monitoring and evaluating practice had helped staff understand their role in leading children's play. As a result there was a changing mindset where staff were motivated to take a lead in the service improvement journey.

Although staff were aware of their responsibility to keep a learning log as part of their professional registration with Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), they were not making full use of the Step into Leadership resources. We have made a new area for improvement about continuing to develop leadership roles under 'How good is our leadership?'

This area for improvement had been met.

Previous area for improvement 5

The provider should consider how to encourage, challenge and motivate staff to take on further responsibilities and accountability which would promote aspirational and wider concept thinking.

This area for improvement was made on 2 November 2017.

Action taken since then

The manager's approach to staff appraisals was to use the early childhood practitioner job description to facilitate discussion. This had supported staff to think constructively about their professional strengths or

where they would benefit from further training and development. It helped affirm staff practise and the potential for future leadership roles. We have made a related area for improvement about continuing to develop leadership roles under 'How good is our leadership?'

This area for improvement had 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?	4 - Good
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	4 - Good

How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good
4.3 Staff deployment	5 - Very Good

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