LASC Childcare Services Ltd (The Link)
Day Care of Children

The Link
5 Mayburn Walk
Loanhead
EH20 9HG

Telephone: 01314 480 103

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
5 May 2023

Service provided by:
LASC Childcare Services Ltd

Service provider number:
SP2003003106

Service no:
CS2015341776

About the service

LASC Childcare Service Ltd (The Link) is registered with the Care Inspectorate to provide a care service to a maximum of 85 children and young people at any one time aged from entry into primary school to 18 years.

During term time the breakfast club may operate from Loanhead Centre, George Avenue, Loanhead, EH20 9LA between 07:00 and 09:00.

The service is one of five services provided by LASC Childcare Service Ltd in Midlothian. The service provides breakfast club, after school and holiday care. They also provide a Saturday Club which is predominantly for children with additional support needs.

The service operates from The Link in Loanhead, Midlothian. This building is leased by the organisation and provides additional community space for groups plus a café. Children have sole use of the building during the operation of the afterschool club, holiday service and Saturday club. The service is located within a residential area in the local community and close to local schools, parks and amenities.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection that took place on 02 May 2023 between 13:30 and 18:15. We returned to the service on 03 May 2023 between 13:30 and 15:30. Two inspectors carried out the inspection.

To prepare for this inspection we reviewed information about the service. This included previous inspection findings, registration and complaints information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered throughout the inspection year.

To inform our evaluations we:

- spoke with and observed children using the service
- spoke with one parent and received written feedback from three families
- spoke with staff, the manager and the senior management team
- observed practice and children's routines and experiences
- reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Children experienced interactions that were filled with kindness, humour and a genuine warmth.
- The service had made improvements across key areas of practice. As a result, children were safe, comfortable and happy within the service.
- The service recognised the importance of strong relationships and positive attachments. This contributed to children being supported by staff that knew them well and understood their needs.
- The service should continue to develop their resources across the service, including the use of natural materials and loose parts. This would support children's natural curiosity and imagination.
- The service should continue to develop their mealtime experience for children. This would support all children to experience a calm, relaxed and sociable mealtime.
- The service should continue to develop their responsive planning approach to incorporate the views of children with additional support needs. This would support all children to have their voice heard within this process.
- The service was committed to continuous improvement and had introduced a detailed quality assurance system. This contributed to improved outcomes for all.

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?	4 - 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

Staff were kind, caring and took a genuine interest in children as individuals. This was demonstrated in a number of ways across the service. For example, through staff conversations, child and staff interactions and feedback from families. One parent shared, "Great staff who are great with the kids". Staff recognised the importance of supporting children's emotional wellbeing and provided an opportunity for children to share how they were feeling. For example, checking in with individual children as they arrived at the service and listening to how their day had been. It was clear that positive relationships between staff and children had been built. Moving forward, the service could look at further opportunities to develop resources and visual prompts or aids. This would contribute to children's emotional wellbeing and support them to communicate their feelings and build positive relationships.

The service had developed strong relationships with families. The use of digital apps, parents evenings and a variety of ongoing communication methods supported partnership working between staff and parents. Staff used an achievement tree to support children to share what was important to them and recognise their achievements. This supported families and children to feel valued and important within the service.

Children's mealtime experiences had improved since our last inspection. Most children experienced a sociable and unhurried mealtime. Staff sat with children and understood the importance of this experience. Children and staff engaged in one to one conversations and took the opportunity to share news about their school day. However, this was not yet embedded in practice and was inconsistent across the spaces. The service should continue to develop and embed this experience to ensure that all children are consistently offered a calm, relaxed and welcoming mealtime experience.

The service had proactively worked with children, families and other professionals to develop support strategies that reflected children's individual needs. Staff were sensitive and skilled when responding to children with additional support needs. Interactions between children and staff were filled with kindness, humour and a genuine warmth. Children that required one to one support within the service had the opportunity to influence which person supported them. This contributed to children being able to influence their care, make choices and have their voice heard.

Quality Indicator 1.3: Play and learning

Children experienced a balance of planned and spontaneous activities. One parent told us, "All the staff are fab, they also incorporate loads of activities into a session and are really involved in my children's play". Children were meaningfully and actively involved in leading their play and learning. For example, children worked together with staff to discuss activities they would like to take part in and resources they would like out in the space. One child told us, "You get to choose what you would like to do". This supported children to feel valued and respected and allowed them to develop their own ideas and interests.

Children's play experiences were enhanced through the use of the local and wider community. Children could choose to spend their time at the local park or joining a group at the football pitch. The service also

made use of the wider community spaces and organised day trips during holiday club when children attended for longer periods of the day. This supported children to have new experiences and feel connected to their own and wider communities.

The service had begun to develop a responsive planning approach. Information that was gathered as part of the services personal planning approach was also transferred into the planning process. This meant that key information that had been shared by the child and parents directly influenced children's experiences in the setting. Staff worked with some children to plan and reflect on their play experiences. The service should continue to build on their good practice and introduce opportunities for children with additional support needs to be more involved in planning their play experiences. This would support all children to influence this process and have their voices heard.

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

Since our last inspection staff had worked hard to introduce some new resources within the space. Some children had access to resources that reflected their current interests. For example, a child had a clear interest in 'movement', 'balance' and 'cause and effect' and spent time exploring the balance board that had been introduced in the space. The service had invested in a few new resources and some of these were available for children to self-select. One parent shared, "We continue to be very pleased with the service and particularly the more recent increase in opportunities for the children". Staff spent time at their daily meeting discussing children's interests and deciding which resources would support and extend these. While we saw this in part of the service, we did not see this consistently across all spaces. While we recognise that the service had plans to develop the spaces available to children with additional support needs, this work had not yet begun. The service should develop inviting spaces that have a variety of resources and materials that support children across the whole service. This would give all children the opportunity to be in an environment that promotes curiosity, excitement and new play experiences (see area for improvement 1).

An important strength in the service was that children had direct access to outdoors. Children were able to choose where they spent their time and moved between indoors and outdoors. The service would benefit from developing their outdoor resources to include loose parts and more natural materials. This would support children to be creative and use their imaginations while spending time in the fresh air.

Since our last inspection the service had evaluated and changed how the spaces across the service were used to best meet the needs of all children. Children with additional support needs now had the use of a separate area. However, they were also encouraged to use the other spaces within the setting. This supported children to access a quieter space if they wished. The service recognised that further work was required to develop the detail within these spaces. For example, the service had plans in place to develop further sensory experiences for children. Moving forward, the manager should ensure that all staff are confident in setting up inviting play spaces that offer new and exciting opportunities for children. Play spaces should reflect children's interests and also promote a sense wonder. This would spark curiosity and imagination as children explore new play experiences.

Appropriate infection prevention and control measures were in place, which helped to support children's health and wellbeing. For example, children washed their hands before eating and tables were cleaned prior to food being served. This supported children to experience a safe, clean environment.

Areas for improvement

1. Children should actively experience high quality play experiences which will challenge and extend their interests. They should have free access to a range of resources across all age groups. This should include but not be limited to open ended resources. To do this the provider should improve children's play spaces to ensure that all children have access to appropriate, organised and well-presented play resources.

This is 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 that I choose, and freely access a wide range of experiences and resources suitable for my age and stage, which stimulate my natural curiosity, learning and creativity' (HSCS 2.27).

How good is our leadership? 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 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well

Children benefitted from a service that was committed to continuous improvement. The management team had a clear understanding of where the service was within their improvement journey. The management team worked together with staff to implement a clear improvement plan that detailed the actions required across the service. Team meetings had been used to support staff to contribute to reflective discussions and ongoing improvement planning within the service. As a result, improvements had been made in key areas of practice. For example, personal plans, support strategies and medication. The service should continue to embed their quality assurance processes and ensure these improvements in practice are sustained. This would contribute to children experiencing a service that continues to evolve and supports them to thrive.

Children and families views were actively sought in a number of ways to inform the development of the service. Daily conversations, information sharing and gathering through digital apps and parents evenings, provided opportunities for parents views to be heard. Children's views were captured in a number of ways across the service, such as, the use of floor books and child feedback sheets. One child shared, "I love afterschool club it's really fun and they listen to everyone and include everyone's opinion". The service should continue to look for creative and new ways to ensure that children with additional support needs are fully involved in this good practice. This would support all children to influence the service and support them to lead and bring about positive changes within the service.

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

Consideration of staff skill's, knowledge and experience was given by management when deploying staff across the service. The service was flexible and adapted staff rotas to respond to individual children's needs. Staff communicated well together and clearly recognised the importance of children's voice within the service. This contributed to the positive, friendly atmosphere that had been created.

The service understood the importance of considering staff deployment during transition periods for children. For example, staff had been moved to work in a different space to support individual children as they settled into the service. Transitions were discussed and planned in partnership with parents. This contributed to children feeling valued and recognised the importance of positive relationships that had been formed between staff and children.

The induction process had opportunities for staff to reflect at various stages and discuss their knowledge and understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The service had reviewed their induction process and a senior member of staff was now leading on this. As a result, staff were given sufficient time and support to understand what was expected of them. This contributed to children being cared for by staff who felt valued and supported.

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

Requirements

Requirement 1

By 20 January 2023, the provider, must ensure that all children's health, welfare and safety needs are met. To do this sufficient information must be gathered and recorded about all children as part of their personal plan, clearly setting out their individual needs, and how these will be met. To do this, the provider, must as a minimum:

a) Ensure consistent effective recording of important information in all personal plans
b) ensure that all personal plans are meaningful working documents that include strategies of support and progress made
c) all staff are aware of and understand the information within the personal plans, including support strategies, and use this to effectively meet each child's needs
d) personal plans are regularly reviewed and updated in partnership with parents and carers.

This is to comply with Regulation 5(2)(b)(c) (Personal Plans) of the Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/210).

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which states that: '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.' (HSCS 1.15).

This requirement was made on 11 October 2022.

Action taken on previous requirement

The service had an effective personal planning approach in place. Personal plans contained children's wishes, likes and dislikes and what was important to the child. Staff were aware of children's individual needs and could confidently talk through support strategies that were reflected in children's care plans. These plans had been reviewed and updated in partnership with children and families. This contributed to children receiving consistency and continuity in their care and their individual needs were being met.

Met - within timescales

Requirement 2

By 10 December 2022, the provider must ensure children's medical needs are safely managed. To do this, the provider must, at a minimum ensure:

a) Comprehensive medical support plans and systems are in place for children who require them
b) medical permission forms are fully completed by parents and carers prior to the administration of medication
c) medication administered is accurately recorded
d) staff are knowledgeable and competent in relation to the recording of medication and follow the 'Management of Medication in Day Care of Children and Childminding Services' guidance.

This is in order to comply with the Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulation 2011 (SSI 2011/210) 4(1)(a) - Requirements to make proper provision for the health and welfare of service users.

This is to ensure care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'Any treatment or intervention that I experience is safe and effective' (HSCS 1.24).

This requirement was made on 11 October 2022.

Action taken on previous requirement

The service had improved the way in which they manage and monitor medication. Children that required medication had support plans in place. These managed a clear stepped approach for staff to follow when action was required. Support plans had been developed in partnership with families. The service had the relevant permission slips in place which had been signed and updated by parents. The service had improved the recording of the administration of medication. Staff had been supported to develop their knowledge and understanding of this new system through reflective discussions and staff questionnaires. This had enabled staff to feel confident to respond to children's health and medical needs. This contributed to children's health and wellbeing needs being met.

Met - within timescales

Requirement 3

By 20 January 2023, the provider must ensure improved outcomes for children by implementing effective and robust self-evaluation and quality assurance processes. To do this the provider must, at a minimum, ensure:

a) Regular, effective, and focused monitoring is carried out across the setting
b) robust audits are developed and implemented, and any actions are addressed promptly
c) clear and effective plans are developed to maintain and improve the service
d) staff are meaningfully involved in self-evaluation to promote continuous improvement
e) 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 is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the 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).

This requirement was made on 11 October 2022.

Action taken on previous requirement

Following our last inspection the service had introduced a clear and detailed development plan to address the actions required. This had been shared with the staff team and ongoing reflective discussions had taken place. All staff had contributed to the ongoing improvements across the service. The management team were visible within the service modelling good practice and observing staff practice. Feedback to individual staff was shared through a variety of methods. For example, in the moment feedback, reflective end of day conversations, team meetings and staff support and supervision. As a result improvements had been made across the service. This contributed to positive experiences for children, families and staff.

Met - within timescales

Requirement 4

By 20 January 2023, the provider, must support children's health, welfare and safety needs by maintaining appropriate staffing levels at all times. Staff must be suitably trained, qualified and deployed effectively to secure positive outcomes for children.

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

a) Plan staff rotas to ensure children's needs are met, particularly at transition times such as meal times
b) staff deployment must take account of the mix of the skills and experiences of the team
c) put measures in place to guarantee a responsive approach to children's care, which meets their individual support needs.

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

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

This requirement was made on 11 October 2022.

Action taken on previous requirement

The service had appropriate staffing levels across both days of the inspection. Staff rotas were planned by senior management and consideration was given to children's daily routines, needs and wishes. Staff deployment took into consideration the staff skills, knowledge and experience across the service. Staff worked well together as a team and were flexible in response to children's individual needs. This contributed to children's overall health, safety and wellbeing.

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 support children's health and wellbeing and ensure a positive mealtime experience, staff should improve the lunchtime experience. The manager should ensure that all staff have a shared understanding of the value of mealtime experiences for children.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that 'I can enjoy unhurried snack and meal times in as relaxed an atmosphere as possible' (HSCS 1.35).

This area for improvement was made on 11 October 2022.

Action taken since then

Children experienced a sociable and unhurried snack time experience. Some staff sat with children and took the opportunity to have one to one conversations and check in with children's wellbeing.

Children had the opportunity to be part of the planning, preparation and serving of their own snack. This supported children to make choices, develop independence and build a sense of responsibility.

The service should continue to develop and embed good practice in this area. This would ensure that children continue to experience a positive, nurturing mealtime with staff that recognise the value and importance of quality daily routines.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

To improve the quality of children's experiences, staff should ensure that children are meaningfully involved in leading their play and learning through a balance of planned and spontaneous experiences. Children's choice should be promoted, and their learning and development extended through skilful staff interactions.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I can choose to have an active life and participate in a range of recreational, social, creative, physical and learning activities every day, both indoors and outdoors' (HSCS 1.25).

This area for improvement was made on 11 October 2022.

Action taken since then

The service had a responsive planning approach in place to support children's play and learning. Children experienced a balance of planned and spontaneous activities that reflected their current interests. Staff were responsive to children's requests and introduced additional resources to support children's play and learning. This contributed to improved outcomes for all.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 3

Children should actively experience high quality play and learning experiences which will challenge and extend their learning. They should have free access to a range of resources across all age groups. This should include but not be limited to open ended resources. To do this the provider should improve the learning environment to ensure that all children have access to appropriate, organised and well-presented play resources.

This is 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 that I choose, and freely access a wide range of experiences and resources suitable for my age and stage, which stimulate my natural curiosity, learning and creativity' (HSCS 2.27).

This area for improvement was made on 11 October 2022.

Action taken since then

The service had developed and invested in further resources since our last inspection. Certain resources had been introduced in response to individual children's interests. The service had further plans to improve the resources for children with additional support needs.

While we recognise the improvements the service had made since our last inspection, further action was required. The service should continue to develop resources that are age appropriate and offer challenge and curiosity. This should include the development of more open ended resources.

This area for improvement will be restated.

Previous area for improvement 4

Children should have free access to a range of appropriate, organised and well-presented play resources across all age groups. These should include interesting and engaging activities to include but not limited to natural resources.

This is 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 that I choose, and freely access a wide range of experiences and resources suitable for my age and stage, which stimulate my natural curiosity, learning and creativity' (HSCS 2.27).

This area for improvement was made on 11 October 2023.

Action taken since then

Staff knew children well and used this knowledge when introducing some of the resources each day. For example, staff brought out a box of toy train resources to support and extend a child's interest.

Management had organised a development day for all staff. This had focussed on different play types and introducing new play opportunities across the service. Further time was now needed to allow staff to transfer this new knowledge into practice.

Management should continue to monitor the quality of children's play spaces and resources and ensure that these are of a consistent high quality. This would support children of all ages to have a wide range of resources and quality play spaces to support their play and learning.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 5

To ensure children experience high quality care the provider should develop further self-evaluation systems to assess the quality of the service. This should include priorities for improvement and how these improvements will be achieved.

This is to ensure the quality of the environment is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'As a child, I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes' (HSCS 9.19) and 'I experience high quality care and support because people have the necessary information and resources' (HCSC 4.27).

This area for improvement was made on 11 October 2022.

Action taken since then

The service had involved all staff in meaningful ongoing self-evaluation processes. Team meetings had provided a platform to capture staff views and encourage reflective discussions.

Management had used the Care Inspectorate, 'A quality framework for daycare of children, childminding and school-aged children' (2022) to benchmark their service and carry out ongoing self-evaluation. As a result, we saw improvements in key areas of practice across the service. This contributed to positive outcomes for children.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 6

To support ongoing practice and improve outcomes for children, staff should access further training and self-learning. This should include but is not limited to training in child development theory. The manager should support staff to implement their learning through the mentoring and appraisal process.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I have the confidence in people because they are trained, competent and skilled' (HCSC 3.14).

This area for improvement was made on 11 October 2022.

Action taken since then

Staff had completed mandatory training, such as child protection, first aid and food hygiene. This helped staff to understand their roles and responsibilities as a registered worker. The service had provided further training that focussed on different play types, adult and child interactions, along with supporting and extending children play and learning. Staff had been supported to complete training evaluations. Ongoing reflective discussions had taken place to assess the impact individual training was having on practice.

Management carried out individual support and supervision. This had enabled staff to consider their individual skills, knowledge and experience and address any gaps in practice. This contributed to improved outcomes for all.

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	4 - Good
1.3 Play and learning	4 - 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?	4 - Good
4.3 Staff deployment	4 - Good

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