Cardross Early Learning and Childcare
Day Care of Children

Kirkton Road
Cardross
G82 5PN

Telephone: 01389 841 433

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
6 September 2022

Service provided by:
Argyll and Bute Council

Service provider number:
SP2003003373

Service no:
CS2019375695

About the service

Cardross Early Learning and Childcare is provided by Argyll and Bute Council. The service was registered on 15 August 2019 to provide a care service to a maximum of 30 children aged from three years old to not yet attending primary school, term time only.

The service is based within Cardross Primary School and has access to a large playroom, adjoining cloakroom, toilet and changing facilities. There is a large outdoor play area which can be access directly from the playroom.

The service is based within the village of Cardross and is easily accessible by walking, driving or using public transport.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Wednesday 31 August 2022, Friday 2 September 2022 and Tuesday 6 September 2022. This was the service's first inspection and it was carried out by one inspector from the Care Inspectorate.

To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included:
- registration information
- information submitted by the service
- and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

In making our evaluations of the service we:
- spoke with eight people using the service and seven members of their families
- spoke with six staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Children were happy, confident and safe. Children were having fun and enjoying their learning and development opportunities. Children's care routines were tailored to their individual needs and were delivered with kindness and sensitivity.
- Families commented very positively about the transition to primary 1 (P1).
- Children's lunch time experiences needed to be improved including the provision of alternative choices to ensure children had enough to eat.
- Children had good space for their needs indoors and outdoors.
- Parents appreciated children's access to outdoors and the local community.
- Strong positive relationships within the team and a shared understanding of the importance of working closely together.
- Staff were confident in their roles and committed to providing quality outcomes to children, their families and the local community.
- Families valued the time available to talk to staff about their children at drop off and collection times.

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?	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

We focused on how well children were nurtured and supported.

A formal nurture approach was being developed across the whole school including early learning and childcare, in line with the local authority document - Our Children, Their Nurturing Education. This would see children receiving targeted wellbeing support to help them reach their full potential.

All About Me forms and personal plans had been completed to ensure staff had the most up-to-date information about children's wellbeing needs. Families discussed the partnership approach to completing these telling us "I am aware of my child's care plan, we fill it in at the start of the year and last year it was referenced at different times" and "I must admit that the ELC has blown me away with their keenness to provide a great care setting. Simple things like the lovely welcome each morning, keyworker taking the time to get to know my child's likes/dislikes."

Staff intended to review and improve these plans to encourage more involvement of children and their families in providing more meaningful information about children's health, welfare and safety needs. Staff talked confidently to us about children's individual needs. We found that children's care routines were tailored to their individual needs and were delivered with kindness and sensitivity.

Staff demonstrated affection, care and concern for children and recognised the importance of helping to create a calm and relaxed atmosphere.

Good arrangements were in place to support children through their transitions from home to early learning and childcare (ELC) and into primary 1 (P1) - with children having opportunities to spend some time each week with the P1 class teacher. Families commented very positively about the transition to P1: "It is excellent at preparing the children for school in the way of getting them used to lining up, a slightly more structured day, getting P1's to visit on numerous occasions which is absolutely brilliant at boosting their confidence. My child likes to say hello to all of the big school kids that they now know through these visits", "The connection and preparation for school has been invaluable" and "The service provides excellent outdoor provision and transition opportunities into P1 e.g. using gym hall, meeting other children from the school itself."

Children were keen to talk to us about their experiences at the service and to talk to us about their routines. Individual pegs, nametags and drawers were in place to promote a sense of belonging and ownership of their environment. We saw children putting drawings they wanted to save or take home into their drawers independently. Children were regularly consulted, and we could see that children's voices were reflected in wall displays and paperwork.

While snack and lunchtime were well organised, staff were aware they needed to offer children increased opportunities for independence. During two lunch observations we were concerned that children, who did not like the lunch choice offered, did not have enough to eat to sustain them through six hours. We acknowledged that the headteacher was not responsible for the provision of food and snack as this was organised centrally by the local authority.

Lunch was provided from the school kitchen from a menu pre-planned by the local authority; no alternatives were available. Parents also commented on the quality and portion size of the lunches - "I feel the portions and choice of food on the lunchtime menu could be better as there is only one choice at a time and feel that the previous menus were better with more choice and variety. It just feels like the current delivery of menus/portions etc are more of a cost cutting measure and are really basic. The ELC provide nice healthy snacks but I just feel that school lunches should be better. I feel that's more to do with the local authority and isn't really something that the ELC have control over though unfortunately, I hope that doesn't reflect poorly on the ELC as it really is a great place."

We noted that some parents had provided packed lunches on the days that they knew their children would not like the choice offered. Children attending the ELC had an entitlement to free milk and lunches and more needed to be done to ensure these entitlements were met and that children had enough to eat each day (see area for improvement 1.)

Following the inspection we had a productive conversation with the local authority about lunch provision and were pleased to note that this was to be addressed.

Overall, more could have been done to improve the children's lunchtime experience. The headteacher and staff should explore current best practice guidance and case studies and look at how this could be adapted in their setting to improve outcomes for children. For example, https://hub.careinspectorate.com/how-we-support-improvement/care-inspectorate-programmes-and-publications/food-matters/

1.3 Play and learning

We focused on children's right to play, have fun, experience joy and the resulting impact this has on their learning and development.

Children were happy, confident and safe. Children were having fun and enjoying their learning and development opportunities. They were supported to learn some independence skills, make choices and to some extent lead their own learning. Staff demonstrated effective use of questioning to extend children's thinking, widen their skills and consolidate their learning through play.

Staff were building confidence in planning to ensure they placed the needs and interests of children at the centre of their learning through play. The current planning format had been introduced at the start of term. Staff told us they would evaluate and review the effectiveness of this approach as the term progressed. Staff aimed for balance between adult led activities and children leading their own learning but would benefit from support to ensure they are offering provocations to support children's observed interests and curiosities to promote their learning and development. We discussed the need for children to share their own visions of how they could play and learn.

Parents told us staff were good at "Encouraging learning in different ways; from exploring in the woods, playing in the garden, to all the many activities in the room. They are good at mixing things up and keeping the kids interested."

Staff recognised children's individual schemas and discussed with families the importance of their role in supporting these schemas to develop children's learning at home. Schemas are behaviours that children go through when they are exploring the world and trying to find out how things work.

We could see that staff recognised, supported and took pleasure in children's skills and achievements during our visit, regularly offering praise and encouragement and recording individual observations in children's online learning journals. Staff shared these observations with families to ensure they could clearly see the individual progress their children were making in learning and development.

Staff used Argyll and Bute Council developmental milestones to track children's progress in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Parents told us "The staff make a real effort to interact with parents every day about their children and, in my opinion, know my child very well. They frequently update the Seesaw app with updates which helps me to talk to my child about what they have been up to each day. There are also scheduled phone calls each term that allow parents to hear more about the specific experiences and outcomes that the children have been working towards. We also received an end of year report before the summer holidays" and "My child has a personal care plan. We are kept up-to-date with regular pictures on the Seesaw app. Also detailed reports given out at end of the year."

During our visit, children particularly enjoyed outdoor play and a visit to the local woods. We observed children enjoying filling the water tray, involved in loose parts construction outdoors, talking about the letters in their names and playing in the mud kitchen.

Areas for improvement

1. To promote children's wellbeing, understanding and enjoyment of healthy eating, the manager and staff should improve mealtime experiences. This should include liaison with the service provider to review the current menu ensuring that children have enough to eat at lunchtime, including an acceptable alternative to the option available.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: "I can choose suitably presented and healthy meals and snacks, including fresh fruit and vegetables, and participate in menu planning" (HSCS 1.33) and "My meals and snacks meet my cultural and dietary needs, beliefs and preferences" (HSCS 1.37).

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.

We focused on the physical environment in which children were cared for, ensuring that the environment was appropriate with good quality furnishings and equipment.

Good standards of health and safety, cleanliness and decor were observed throughout. Children freely explored their environment, both indoors and outdoors, in the knowledge that comprehensive risk assessments underpinned staff practice. Staff talked confidently about the measures in place to ensure children's safety.

Good systems were in place to manage electronic information in line with general data protection requirements managed by the local authority. This meant that children's personal information was kept confidential.

The setting was comfortable, furnished to a very good standard and welcoming, with plenty of natural light and ventilation. This gave a strong message to children and their families that they matter. A parent told us "Cardross ELC is a positive and empowering environment that my child loves and is absolutely exploding in confidence and approaches learning in such an enthusiastic way and that is all down to the brilliant job that everyone at Cardross ELC do."

Children had good space for their needs indoors and outdoors. Staff monitored available floor space and playroom layout when the service was at capacity, to ensure outcomes for children were not compromised. Parents had noticed that the playroom could be busy at times "It would be nice if they had a smaller separate quiet space/room for the kids to have a quiet read. They do have a reading area which the children are welcome to go to at any time for quiet time but it is all in the same room." During our visits, staff supported children well to ensure they could experience quiet areas both indoors and outdoors.

Children had good opportunities to explore the local community, including the shore, local shops and library. We joined children on their regular visit to the woods in the school grounds and some enjoyed collecting wood for a "fire" and climbing trees. Others engaged enthusiastically in action songs and listened to a story. Parents appreciated children's access to outdoors and the local community, telling us "I think one of the ELCs main selling points is the fact that it has a fantastic safe and secure garden that the children can transition to and from the full day, rain or shine. We are lucky to have fantastic surroundings also with the children being taken to the forest and down to the beach at times which gets them out seeing the local community on their way to these places."

The outdoor play area was very large and had been equipped with a range of different areas including a mud kitchen, sand pit, water play, construction, a small summerhouse (outdoor classroom) and several smaller wooden playhouses. Children could experience physical play, run, hide and enjoy loose parts outside for open ended play. There were areas for mark-making, music, role play and messy play. There were limited opportunities for climbing within the outdoor area and the provision of dedicated climbing apparatus would ensure children could climb safely.

The outdoor area could have been better organised and equipped to provide a more enabling and enriched environment, which would provide more provocations and encouragement for children to lead their own learning. Indoors we noted that many of the play resources out on our first visit were out again two days later. Staff should continue to review these regularly, focusing on children's progressing development and considering how their individual interests could be incorporated into activities.

Children could freely access the outdoor play area but could not freely access their outdoor clothes and boots. The location of the cloakroom meant they could not go outside without staff assistance. The headteacher advised that during the winter, a trolley for coats and boots was placed at the door within the playroom, but it did require significant space. We agreed that this was not a long-term solution, other solutions should be explored focusing on increased opportunities for independence.

Overall, we found that there were good arrangements in place to prevent and control the spread of infection within the service to protect staff and children. Nappy changing was carried out in line with best practice guidance. Children were learning about protecting themselves from germs through good hand hygiene practices. Staff encouraged children to cough into their elbows, wipe their own noses, dispose of tissues safely and take responsibility for washing their hands. The service provider may wish to look at the current soap dispensers as many children were unable to use these without staff assistance - this is particularly relevant for the independence of those children going to the toilet unassisted.

While appropriate arrangements were in place to record details of any accidents occurring within the service and to pass this information onto families, we discussed the need to put a similar system in place to record any incidents. Staff should ensure a consistent approach to completing this paperwork.

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.

The headteacher told us that the service was working on the development of a play pedagogy across the early level provision (ELC/P1) and ensuring that there was a shared understanding of this across the staff team and with families. The team recognised that young children learn best when actively engaged, interacting and co-constructing their learning. Children had opportunities to use their play to explore ideas, concepts and develop relationships.

The service improvement plan was underpinned by relevant local and national guidance and legislative frameworks and were useful tools for improvement. They outlined clear points for action, responsibilities and timescales. The priorities were clear, realistic and achievable and should lead to sustained improvement in outcomes for children and families.

Staff discussed their role in self-evaluation and told us how they informally discussed their practice, what was working well and what needed to be improved. The service had been registered with the Care Inspectorate for three years and mainly during the Covid-19 pandemic with the subsequent trials this had brought. At times, the constraints and staffing issues caused by Covid-19 had impacted on the ability of the staff team to be involved in formal self-evaluation processes within the service.

From our discussions with the headteacher and staff team, we found that there was a clear ethos of continuous improvement using How Good Is Our Early Learning and Childcare? to focus on the delivery of quality practice, leading to improved outcomes for children.

Staff told us they felt their views and opinions were valued and respected in relation to improvements across the service. Children were regularly consulted and families had been issued with regular surveys to ensure they had their say.

Families were being encouraged back into the service which allowed for more discussion to take place and enabled them to become more involved in their children's care and learning. Parents told us they appreciated these opportunities to visit the service "The ELC are fantastic in their communication and their relationship with parents is a really nice close relationship. They encourage input from the parents and encourage parental involvement/input which from a parent's standpoint is really nice to get involved and feel valued that the ELC really want to hear what I think would be good and for the children it is really nice to be able to learn new skills and knowledge from parents that they might not necessarily get to learn in any other environment. Knew how to make comments and suggestions if they felt the need" and "Parents have been invited to give views at a few meetings and suggest any ways that improvements can be made and how we can get involved to improve the experience for the children. For example, you are invited to come and share your skills; play music, make treats, do crafts or read books."

A clear calendar of staff meetings was in place giving staff opportunities for professional dialogue around local and national best practice guidance, self-evaluation and discussion of practice issues. Staff told us that these meetings were a valuable forum to share information about children's needs and progress.

Staff had worked hard to ensure that the challenges brought about as a result of Covid-19 measures put in place, had not had too great an impact on relationships with families and were embracing the renewed focus on family engagement.

How good is our staff team? 5 - Very Good

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

The headteacher recognised the importance of ensuring that the service was appropriately staffed during the day as essential to the wellbeing of children in the service. Staff told us they felt valued, well supported and appreciated the accessibility of the headteacher.

Staff worked without close day-to-day supervision and management due to the limited hours allocated for the headteacher to manage the early learning and childcare (ELC) aspect of the school provision. We found that this had resulted in strong positive relationships within the team and a shared understanding of the importance of working closely together. We observed a strong team working ethos and effective channels of communication within the service and with families. Parents appreciated the positive communication channels in place telling us "The staff make a real effort to interact with parents every day about their children and, in my opinion, know my child very well."

As stated, staff demonstrated an effective approach to teamworking and they communicated well with their colleagues during the working day. This system meant that they could carry out all necessary tasks with minimum disruption to the children's experiences, especially when a task took them away from their responsibilities. This allowed them to work well together to ensure effective supervision and positive engagement with children across the day.

Staff were confident in their roles and committed to providing quality outcomes to children, their families and the local community.

Keyworking arrangements were in place to promote continuity of care across the day and ensure positive transitions for children and communication with families. Families were advised of any changes to the staff team through Expressions and appreciated opportunities to meet staff in person, "Staff held a coffee morning last week and it was a great way to meet some of the other parents. The open door policy is fantastic and it really makes a difference as a parent to feel included as part of the Early Learning Journey and have introductions to staff members, not only of the ELC but also the school."

Parents told us they valued the time available to talk to staff about their children at drop off and collection "The staff are very friendly and welcoming and I am updated regularly through Seesaw on what my child has been doing throughout the day but also at pickup times I am always given a debrief of how my child's day went which I find very helpful. I don't have any complaints as the ELC are fantastic with their communication." However, others commented on the need for a bit more time at pick up "Pick-up can be chaotic, as expected with the children all being collected at one time slot. It would perhaps be nice to have a 'hand over' at the end of the day with a little more input from staff/key worker about my child's day. But I appreciate this isn't always possible and the updates on Seesaw do help fill in the blanks."

The local authority had recently introduced a new approach to continuous professional development (CDP), which would enable staff to meet more regularly with the headteacher to discuss CPD.

Staff were encouraged to consider the impact of training sessions undertaken on their professional practice and we suggested that it may also be beneficial to consider and measure the impact of staff training on outcomes for children as staff told us this was not routine practice.

All staff were registered to practice with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), had undertaken qualifications relevant to their roles and engaged in some continuous professional learning. Throughout our visit staff treated children with respect and we could see that children had positive relationships with staff. Staff knew children well and responded considerately and patiently to their needs, conversations and questions.

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the service registered. Details of any 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?	5 - Very Good
4.3 Staff deployment	5 - Very Good

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Contact us

Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

enquiries@careinspectorate.com

0345 600 9527

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