Abriachan Forest School
Day Care of Children

Abriachan Forest Trust
Abriachan
Inverness
IV3 8LD

Telephone: 01463 861 236

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
17 September 2021

Service provided by:
Abriachan Forest Trust

Service provider number:
SP2019013377

Service no:
CS2019377184

About the service

Abriachan Forest School is an outdoor nursery which is an integral part of Abriachan Forest Trust. The service has access to a large and diverse outdoor area which offers a very wide range of opportunities for outdoor exploration and learning.

This service registered with the Care Inspectorate on 22 January 2020 to provide a day care of children service to a maximum of 32 children at any one time aged 3 to those not yet of an age to attend primary school.

We check services are meeting the principles of Getting it right for every child (also known as GIRFEC). Set up by Scottish Government, GIRFEC is a national approach to working in a consistent way with all children and young people. It is underpinned by the principles of prevention and early intervention. The approach helps services focus on what makes a positive difference for children and young people - and what they can do to improve. Getting it right for every child is being woven into all policy, practice, strategy and legislation that affect children, young people and their families.

What people told us

The children present during the session were observed as being very happy and relaxed in the care of the staff. There was a very good rapport between the children and staff which allowed for natural and open communication. The children were all engaged in a range of activities. The children enjoyed showing us what they had been making and enthusiastically told us about a camera they had set up to hopefully catch photographs of a pine marten visiting the site.

During the inspection five parents and carers gave us feedback. Parents and carers were all extremely happy with the standard of care their children received and the opportunities attending a forest school had provided them with.

Comments made included:

"I cannot speak highly enough of it".
"My children all absolutely loved it. They have learned so much about the outdoors and different animals, plants etc".
"The staff are all so lovely and caring and do an excellent job of making the kids feel welcome and part of a family".
"This is a fantastic nursery".
"I cannot recommend this nursery enough"!
"The staff have been wonderful, and the location and the way they use their resources is fantastic".
"I love the fact my son is getting to spend so much time outdoors and discovering the magic of a forest on the hill. He comes home telling me stories about finding the Gruffalo's cave and a magical spider that can float, and hearing his stories is a joy".
"Seeing the photos on the SeeSaw is a great way to see what they are up to".
"There's a lot of activities like whittling and tree planting and other things that are very unique to the setting given it's location".
"The weekly story is generally always around a nature element or theme and she loves the stories- often tells me about them that evening".
"The crafts activities are lovely - a real mixture of letting them do their own thing and also some awesome little ideas from the leaders - like once they made butterflies from pegs and cloth, or "busy bees" from pine

cones and string".
"My daughter tells me that when she grows up she wants to be a teacher in forest school just like Roni and she is always absolutely glowing when I pick her up".
"Over the summer months we really witnessed how our daughter has developed both physically and mentally and could see how her time at Abriachan has shaped her character. She is brave and confident and yet very emotionally aware of others and I really do think a lot of this can be attributed to the guys there".
"She very excitedly tells us all about the wee adventures during the day and loves telling me about the snacks and lunches she has 'helped' make".

Self assessment

The service had not been asked to complete a self-assessment in advance of this inspection.

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 quality of care and support has been evaluated as very good. We found that there were major strengths in supporting positive outcomes for children.

The children were all extremely happy, settled and relaxed during their time in the nursery. They experienced warm, caring and nurturing interactions from staff who supported their care needs. Staff offered comfort and cuddles when needed, which gave the children reassurance. This supported children to feel safe and secure during their time at the service.

We observed the children all having lots of fun during the session. We saw that children were very engaged in their play in a purposeful and meaningful way. Children were encouraged to follow their interests and curiosities and lead their play experiences. Staff made very good use of their questioning and conversations with children to expand their learning.

The staff made good use of online communication with parents and carers which helped to maintain positive relationships, especially at times when the children were unable to attend the nursery. They shared newsletters and kept families up-to-date with their children's learning through a variety of methods including emails and online learning journeys. This was highlighted as a strength by parents as this enabled them to feel informed and included. Comments made included: "The regular SeeSaw updates that we receive enable us to engage with our daughter about what she gets up to and it is something we look forward to each week", and "The SeeSaw app is lovely- they take some awesome photos of her and I like that I don't get bombarded with other pics of everyone else's kids- the system is set up to just show me my own daughter".

Staff were all aware of the individual care needs of the children attending. Each of the children had a personal plan in place which was routinely updated in conjunction with parents and carers. Personal plans contained the essential information to ensure staff met the individual needs of the children attending and ensured there was consistency and continuity in care routines.

The children experienced positive and relaxed meal and snack times. The children enjoyed being actively involved in preparing snacks and meals. The children told us about the fruit and vegetables they had been involved in growing and how they had harvested them and eaten them. The children were able to have lunch at a pace which was right for them. These were very social events where the staff sat with the children and chatted with them. The children received appropriate levels of support and independence skills were promoted.

We were satisfied that the service had appropriate infection prevention and control procedures in place to support a safe environment for children and families. For example, good handwashing routines were in place and had been adapted in line with current guidance.

Staff had a clear understanding of their role and responsibility relating to keeping children safe and protected. Staff had completed child protection training. This helped reduce the potential risk of harm to children, as staff had the knowledge and confidence to respond to any concern.

We looked at the policy and procedure in relation to the administration of medication. The service should amend the policy to include a statement that parents will administer the first dose of any medication. This is to ensure that the policy and procedure reflects current good practice.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 0

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 0

Grade: 5 - very good

Quality of environment

Findings from the inspection

We evaluated this quality theme to be very good. We found that there were major strengths in supporting positive outcomes for children.

Abriachan Forest School was a fully outdoor service with access to various sites within Abriachan Forest. The service offered the children a rich and diverse outdoor environment where they could be adventurous, develop their resilience, be active, explore, be independent and develop a range of physical skills. Parents were extremely positive about how their children's experiences at forest school had impacted on them. One parent commented:

"Over the summer months we really witnessed how our daughter has developed both physically and mentally and could see how her time at Abriachan has shaped her character".

The site had been set up to provide children with a wide range of activities which offered very good opportunities for the children to be imaginative and creative in their explorative play and investigative learning while learning new skills. It was well organised and children had access to a variety of engaging, creative resources for example, open-ended and natural resources, mud kitchen, digging area, loose parts resources, water play, numeracy and literacy resources. Staff routinely reviewed children's use of resources and areas to make sure that children were engaged and challenged.

We saw children who explored happily and were engaged in their play. They were able to direct their own play and activities in a way that they chose. The children had the time and space to develop their own interests. We observed the children all moving comfortably and confidently around the site and selecting various activities, either on their own or in small groups.

The children had taken part in planting, growing and harvesting various fruit and veg which gave them an insight into sustainability and learning about where their food came from.

Children attending the service were kept safe through the various systems the manager and staff had in place. Staff explained that they completed daily visual checks before the children arrived as well as at the end of the day. Staff fully involved the children in risk assessments and problem-solving to build their confidence and skills in assessing risk and safe decision-making. We saw children were all very aware of their environment and were confident in recognising potential risks and ensuring their own safety and the safety of others.

As a fully outdoor provision, the spread of infection was significantly reduced. The service was proactive in relation to putting in place all the appropriate precautions to ensure the safety of the children and to prevent the spread of infection whilst still encouraging the children's natural curiosity, imaginative play and resilience. Staff had access to personal protective equipment (PPE) and cleaning materials such as aprons, gloves and sprays as required.

The service had very good resources and systems in place to encourage and support good hand hygiene. The service already had outdoor handwashing facilities in place. As well as using the warm running water and soap at the kitchen area and toilets to thoroughly wash their hands, the staff all had access to hand sanitiser.

The children were all very confident in washing their hands. The staff had spoken to them in a child friendly way about handwashing and had made it a fun experience. The children could confidently tell us why it was important to regularly wash their hands thoroughly. Some of the children enthusiastically sang to us some of the songs they sang when washing their hands.

The service had put in place a system for the safe drop off and collection of children. Parents had to wait at the collection point, a short distance from the nursery site while staff accompanied children to and from the site. This arrangement allowed for staff to safely provide parents with some feedback each day.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 0

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 0

Grade: 5 - very good

Quality of staffing

Findings from the inspection

We evaluated this quality theme to be very good. We found that there were major strengths in supporting positive outcomes for children.

Recruitment procedures for the service were effective and reflected best practice. Arrangements were in place to ensure all staff had the necessary skills, experience, qualifications and values to provide good quality childcare and education. All staff had the required pre-employment checks and were registered with a relevant organisation such as Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) or General Teaching Council.

There was a small staff team made up of the manager and two early years practitioners. They were all very committed and motivated to provide children with the opportunity to have the freedom to play, investigate, develop and learn in a natural environment. There was very much a shared ethos and holistic approach to child development and learning which allowed children to experience a consistent high standard of care. This approach was strongly supported and advocated by the service's board of directors.

Staff had a good rapport which allowed for very natural communication. We observed staff being very warm and nurturing towards children who were given hugs and comfort when needed. This enabled children to feel valued and cared for. Children enjoyed spending time with staff and were comfortable in their company.

Staff recognised the importance of developing strong and secure attachments with children and how skilled interactions supported children's play and learning. They were tuned into children's individual developmental needs and were able to respond effectively to children's cues. Staff made use of effective questioning to extend children's thinking and problem-solving skills. They understood how children's play could be extended when using open-ended materials.

Staff took responsibility for their own learning and maintained effective records of this. All staff were involved in training. Both of the early years practitioners had started their SVQ training while the manager was completing a childhood practice qualification. The staff saw their training as an opportunity to improve their practice and to add to the ongoing development of the service. They reflected on the impact of training undertaken on their practice and the outcomes for children.

Staff confirmed that there were regular staff meetings. These meetings were very productive. They promoted time for reflective discussions, updated staff on national guidance and also offered opportunities for some elements of training. Staff meetings offered the opportunity for all staff and the manager to be fully involved in the ongoing self-evaluation and development of the service.

The manager used team meetings to update staff on any important changes required in response to Covid-19 and Scottish Government Covid-19 guidance. Staffing arrangements allowed for enhanced cleaning required to minimise the risk of infection to take place whilst not impacting on children's play experiences. This created a safe and clean environment for both children and staff.

Where appropriate, staff wore personal protective equipment (PPE) to reduce the risk of infection spreading. Staff were clear on expectations and procedures to follow if they or a family member became unwell and display symptoms for Covid-19. This reduced opportunities for cross contamination within the setting.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 0

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 0

Grade: 5 - very good

Quality of management and leadership

Findings from the inspection

The quality of management and leadership has been evaluated as very good. We found that there were major strengths in supporting positive outcomes for children.

The manager and staff were committed to the ongoing development of the service and there was a culture of continuous improvement. When identifying improvement priorities, the manager and staff had taken into account the views of children and their families. Listening to the views of families and acting on their wishes showed that they were valued and included.

There were various options available for parents and carers and children to give feedback. For example, there was opportunity for informal feedback at the beginning and end of each session. The manager and staff recognised that meaningful communication with parents and carers was an ongoing priority as was encouraging their involvement in the process of quality assurance. Parents and carers were invited to give feedback at the end of the summer term.

The parents and carers who provided feedback to us confirmed that the manager and staff were very approachable and welcomed any feedback they might have. Parents were of the opinion that the manager and staff, where possible, responded to their suggestions. Listening to the children and taking forward their ideas and suggestions, child led planning, was a priority for the manager and staff.

The manager explained that working directly with staff had allowed her to establish very good working relationships with them. She stated that she very much valued staff feedback and their involvement in the ongoing evaluation of the service. There were various options available to allow for staff consultation and feedback. These included termly staff meetings, individual annual appraisals, as well as daily ongoing informal discussion and feedback. The early years practitioner we spoke with was of the opinion that the manager actively encouraged them to give their comments and suggestions as to how they could continue to develop the service. They felt included in decision-making and planning activities.

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

There are no outstanding requirements.

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

Previous recommendations

There are no outstanding recommendations.

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the service was registered.

Enforcement

No enforcement action has been taken against this care service since it was registered.

Inspection and grading history

This service does not have any prior inspection history or grades.

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