Scallywags Nursery
Day Care of Children

Nursery Building
Crossroads Primary
Dunnet
Thurso
KW14 8XP

Telephone: 01847 851 629

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
10 November 2023

Service provided by:
Highland Council

Service provider number:
SP2003001693

Service no:
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About the service

Scallywags Nursery is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 15 children aged from two years to those not yet attending primary school. The nursery is operated by The Highland Council. The acting head teacher is the registered manager of the nursery. The nursery operates term time only.

Scallywags Nursery is located in a purpose-built wooden building within the grounds of Crossroads Primary School near Dunnet, Caithness. There is an enclosed outdoor play area which contains a range of loose parts and open ended resources, which extend and enrich the children's imaginative play and learning experiences.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 8 November 2023. 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 registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with children using the service
- reviewed online questionnaires completed by parents and carers
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Children experienced warm, caring and nurturing approaches to support their wellbeing.
- Snack was a positive, relaxing and sociable time for children.
- Children were well-supported to learn and develop through play.
- The indoor environment needed to be further developed to create a more homely feel.
- To further support younger children staff would benefit from revisiting research about schematic play.
- Staff were motivated and committed to providing a happy and supportive environment for children.
- Children's voices were valued in the service.
- Quality Assurance processes need to be fully implemented.

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 made an evaluation of good for this key question, as several important strengths taken together clearly outweighed areas for improvement. Whilst some improvements were needed, the strengths identified had a significant positive impact on children's experiences.

Quality Indicator: 1.1 Nurturing care and support

Children experienced warm, caring and nurturing approaches to support their wellbeing. Staff were proactive in supporting children with comfort and reassurance when needed, which contributed to children feeling secure in their experience.

Staff knew children well and were responsive to their individual needs. Staff cuddled and comforted children to support transition and were quick to respond if a child became upset. Staff were good at following cues from children and recognised when a child needed support. This resulted in strong relationships between children and staff. However, due to competing demands placed on staff there were occasions when staff did not respond to individuals to consistently meet their needs at the right time.

Staff managed minor disputes between children well. They skilfully empowered children to think about their choices and how this impacted on their peers. This demonstrated a very calm and supportive approach, which helped children regulate their emotions and enabled them to resolve minor conflicts. As a result, children were gaining confidence and skills in regulating their individual emotional security and wellbeing.

Staff were aware of strategies of support for most children and reflected on this to identify what worked well and how children could be better supported. Whilst staff were knowledgeable about the children, this information was not always well recorded in children's personal plans. This had potential to compromise consistency in children's care.

Mealtimes were sociable and positive experiences for most children. They were encouraged to participate in these daily routines, which provided them with a range of opportunities to be responsible and independent. For example, children took on the role of snack helper and prepared the food for snack. Staff joined children at mealtimes, promoting meaningful conversations. This contributed to the sociable experience for children and provided opportunities for emerging language skills to be developed.

Quality Indicator: 1.3 Play and learning

Children received good quality play experiences, which impacted positively on their health and wellbeing. They were well-supported to learn and develop through play. We saw them leading their own play experiences and independently selecting resources of their choice. They engaged meaningfully with the experiences offered to them. As a result, children presented as happy and confident individuals. Overall staff understood when to engage and when to stand back, to enable children to develop their play at their pace. Through skilful sensitive engagement staff were able to support, extend and challenge children's thinking. As a result most children were engaged in their play and learning. However, we saw some inconsistences in staff practice and missed opportunities where children's interests or patterns of play were missed.

Play experiences were in place to support children to develop skills in language, literacy and numeracy. This included mark-making, sorting and matching. Staff were available to children for storytelling and discussions. This supported children's enjoyment of literacy and the development of their talking and listening skills. Overall staff's natural interactions supported children's language and numeracy development. For example, staff got down to children's level when talking with them and used everyday experiences to explore counting.

Children were offered good experiences outdoors to be imaginative and creative in their explorative play and investigative learning. For example, in the garden children enjoyed exploring in the mud kitchen and sandpit. During water play staff used effective questions, encouraging children to explore, test and develop ideas. This contributed to the development of specific language around pouring, measuring, volume and capacity. This practice could be developed further to ensure these experiences are consistent for all children.

Floor books demonstrated that children were listened to and their ideas and opinions mattered. However, they did not yet evidence depth and progression in learning and support children to achieve their full potential. Additionally, the quality of learning observations within children's learning journeys were inconsistent. They did not always detail the individual learning or skills that were being developed. To further support younger children staff would benefit from revisiting research about schematic play.

How good is our setting? 4 - Good

We made an evaluation of good for this key question, as several important strengths taken together clearly outweighed areas for improvement. Whilst some improvements were needed, the strengths identified had a significant positive impact on children's experiences.

Quality Indicator: 2.2 Children experience high quality facilities

Play spaces benefitted from plenty of natural light. Consideration had been given to creating a quiet space for children to rest and relax. This enabled children to seek out a calm area where they could have some individual time, which supported their emotional wellbeing. However, this could be further developed to promote a more comfortable and welcoming environment, with more cosy areas and homely touches. The service had identified this as an area for improvement and had plans to develop this further.

Staff recognised the benefits of outdoor play and provided children with daily opportunities to access the outdoor nursery area. The outdoor environment was structured to take account of children's age and stage of development. Outdoors, children had access to a range of loose parts, including tyres, cable drums, plastic pipes, sand, water and sticks. These open-ended materials provided children with opportunities to be creative and solve problems.

Whilst we recognised the positive environment and play experiences children received in the outdoor area, we identified areas for development and improvement in relation to the indoor environment. There were some open ended natural real life resources inside that supported children to develop their skills in understanding, thinking, investigation and problem solving. However, the service should continue to develop and embed the use of loose parts play to fully support children to develop their curiosity and creativity.

There were some infection prevention and control procedures which supported a safe environment for the children and staff. For example, we observed children and staff washing their hands at appropriate times throughout the day. However, arrangements in place for nappy changing did not align with best practice. The service were responsive to this and told us alternative arrangements would be made.

How good is our leadership? 4 - Good

We made an evaluation of good for this key question, as several important strengths taken together clearly outweighed areas for improvement. Whilst some improvements were needed, the strengths identified had a significant positive impact on children's experiences.

Quality Indicator: 3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well

There had been recent changes to the management team. The current manager was temporary and had only been in post for a short period of time. They were committed to driving change in the service to improve outcomes for children. They had recognised the need to review the current service vision, values and aims to reflect the aspirations of the children, families, partners and the wider community. This was due to take place in the new term.

Children's voices were valued in the service. Opportunities for children to share their ideas and influence their learning was part of daily experiences. Through observations of play and daily discussions, staff responded to children's interests and suggestions. Children were supported to share and record their ideas in floor books. This resulted in children being empowered, valued and allowed them to drive change.

Self-evaluation processes were evolving, supporting staff to reflect well together. They made good use of best practice documents, supporting the overall evaluation of key performance indicators.
This contributed to some improvements to children's play, care and learning.

Monitoring of staff practice and support and supervision processes were in place. However, they were not yet fully embedded into practice to support a full cycle of improvement.

How good is our staff team? 4 - Good

We made an evaluation of good for this key question, as several important strengths taken together clearly outweighed areas for improvement. Whilst some improvements were needed, the strengths identified had a significant positive impact on children's experiences.

Quality Indicator: 4.3 Staff deployment

Arrangements were in place to promote continuity of care across the day. Children received consistent, stable and compassionate care, from a staff team who were motivated and committed to providing a happy and supportive environment for children. This was highlighted as a key strength by a parent who told us, "We are very lucky to have such dedicated EYP's who work incredibly hard to provide excellent learning experiences for my child".

Staff were respectful and supportive of each other. They were warm, caring and sensitive in their approach. This promoted a happy and secure environment where children were encouraged to lead their own play and learning. They were responsive and respectful of children during interactions and play, which supported children to feel safe.

Overall, the deployment and levels of staff within the nursery was effective. For the majority of time, a good staff to child ratio allowed staff to be responsive to individual needs. However, during busier times of the day there were occasions when the staffing arrangements did not meet children's needs at the right time. There were also a few instances where children were not being appropriately supervised, as staff did not position themselves so they could monitor the room at all times.

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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