St Mary's Nursery Class
Day Care of Children

St. Marys RC Primary School
Whitburn Road
BATHGATE
EH48 2RD

Telephone: 01506652511

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
26 October 2023

Service provided by:
West Lothian Council

Service provider number:
SP2003002601

Service no:
CS2021000014

About the service

St Mary's Nursery Class is registered to provide care to a maximum of 64 children not yet attending primary school at any one time, no more than 10 are aged 2 years to under 3 years.

Care is provided from a purpose built building across one level, which sits within the grounds of St. Mary's Primary School. Children also had access to a large, enclosed garden area. The service is located in a residential area of Bathgate and is situated close to shops, transport links and other amenities.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 24 and 25 October between 09:30 and 17:00. We gave feedback to the management team on 26 October 2023. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors 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 service opened. In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with children using the service and received feedback from 23 of their family members
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Staff supported children with warm and caring interactions, which helped them feel loved, safe and secure.
- Children benefitted from free-flow access to the garden area supporting their overall wellbeing.
- Staff should continue to review the transition and routines at lunch time to help ensure it meets children needs.
- Play spaces were furnished to a high standard which helped children feel like they matter.
- Staff were committed to their role and receptive to suggestions to help improve outcomes for children.
- The use of soft furnishings and neutral décor helped create a calming environment for children.
- The service should review the system in place for families dropping off and collecting children to help ensure opportunities are maximised to share information about their child's day.

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

Children attending the service were happy, settled and comfortable in the nursery environment. Staff used caring and nurturing interactions that were responsive to their needs. This helped children feel loved, safe and secure. For example, staff responded promptly if a child hurt themselves and recognised when they may need help with tasks and activities by offering support. One parent told us, 'the staff are amazing, very caring nurturing and kind', and 'my child is happy and very friendly staff.'

Children were encouraged to be independent and were supported sensitively by staff through praise and encouragement. For example, when getting ready for outdoor play. This promoted their sense of achievement and wellbeing. Staff commented, 'let's do team work together,' and 'can we swap your shoes, so you don't get sore feet.'

Staff knew children well and personal plans were in place, which contained important information to help meet their needs. Plans were reviewed regularly with parents and carers to reflect changes in their lives and care needs. Children's views were included and staff considered ways children communicated to ensure all were heard. For example, by interpreting their actions, gestures and words. Whilst most plans helped staff provide the right care for children, we discussed that recording of some information could be reviewed to help ensure consistently to meet individual needs.

A variety of systems were in place to share information with parents. For example, emails and online platforms. However, whilst some parents commented positively on the communication they received, many parents told us they would like more information about their child's day. Parents told us they would like 'more communication on what your child does whilst at nursery would be good,' 'more handovers at pick up as very little communication, also more pictures on their journals' and 'better communication between staff and parents about their child day.' We shared this with the managers and discussed the importance of welcoming parents into the building at drop off and pick up times. This would help strengthen positive relationship building and maximise opportunities to share information in an informal way about children's day. The service agreed to consider how to make necessary improvements (see area for improvement 1).

Children enjoyed a wide range of nutritious meals and snacks that helped support a healthy diet. For example, fruit, pancakes, cereal and vegetables. Photographs of meals were available which supported children to make choices that reflected their preferences. Some families chose to provide packed lunches from home, which supported children's choice and preferences. However, we noted that some contained high amounts of sugary items such as chocolate and biscuits. We discussed with staff to consider how to work in partnership with families to promote healthy eating. More information can be found in guidance 'Setting the Table' available on our website.

Lunch time routines had recently been improved with a self-service style lunch, which supported children's independence and choice. However, on the first day of inspection the transition from play to lunch was busy, which meant that the environment was noisier and some children became disengaged as they waited for lunch. We recognised that the new lunch routine was still in the early stages and children were getting

used to the new process. We suggested staff should continue to review the lunch routine to help ensure this is a relaxing experience for children.

We reviewed medication systems in place and we were satisfied this in line with best practice guidance and supported the safe administration of medicine to meet children's health and wellbeing needs.

Quality Indicator 1.3: Play and learning.

Children had freedom to make choices about their play and choose from a variety of play areas that supported them to lead their own play. This was enhanced by free flow access to the garden area. Children independently were able to get dressed into their outdoor clothing, supporting their independence skills and confidence. Children that needed help were gently supported by staff helping them to achieve. One child told us, 'We were outside in that heavy rain. My hair got wet.'

Children benefitted from outdoor sensory opportunities using natural materials for digging and exploring. For example, a large walk-in sand pit and well-resourced mud kitchen. Open-ended materials supported opportunities to promote curiosity and problem solving. For example, tyres, crates, logs and pallets.

Songs and stories were plentiful in response to children's interests. Great fun was had as children participated in role playing the story 'Goldilocks and the three bears' and 'Going on a bear hunt.' This supported their enjoyment of connecting with books in an imaginative way and developing their creativity. Interactions from staff were playful and fun which helped ensure children were highly engaged. Children told us, 'I like painting,' and 'I like stories.'

Children's literacy and numeracy skills were developed through a variety of toys and experiences throughout the play spaces. For example, block play, waterplay and mark-making tools. We discussed that staff should widen the amount of materials to support choice and increase opportunities for fine motor skills and mark-making development for younger children. For example, chunky crayons, variety of paintbrushes and other interesting resources.

A relaxed pace of the day provided uninterrupted opportunities for children to be involved in play and learning. One child told us, 'I can play with my friends'. Staff told they wish to review routines further now that the number of children attending the service have increased. For example, considering how to keep the outdoor area open during the lunch period. We suggested reviewing the area rotas to provide better opportunities for staff to observe play and support children's progression. One parent told us, 'I feel the experiences the staff provide are a wide range and child led. I like that they explore the local community with the children and seem to offer a wide range of varied experiences covering all areas of development'.

Approaches to planning included a mix of child-led and adult-initiated experiences to support children's interests. One child told us, 'we have been playing over there, making ice-cream'. Children's comments were valued and included in plans which helped identify next steps. Staff were trialling new ways of recording planning and sharing ideas together to reflect what works best for their service. For example, the introduction of a planning wall. Moving forward the service should continue to reflect on current best practice to support children's play and streamline planning systems to ensure they are manageable and meaningful to track children's progress. To further support younger children, staff would benefit from revisiting research about 'schemas' which is where children repeat patterns of behaviour known as schematic play.

Areas for improvement

1.
To support children's wellbeing, the manager and staff should improve communication and engagement with families to help support strong partnerships. This should include, but is not limited to, sharing information about children's days, ensuring families are welcomed into the setting and seeking parent and carers views about improvements.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which states that: 'I am actively encouraged to be involved in improving the service I use, in a spirit of genuine partnership' (HSCS 4.7) and 'I experience high quality care and support because people have the necessary information and resources' (HSCS 4.27).

How good is our setting? 4 - Good

Quality Indicator 2.2: Children experience high quality facilities

We evaluated this key question as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Play spaces that were bright, clean and well ventilated. Large windows and sliding doors flooded the playroom with natural daylight, which allowed children to see outdoors and supported their wellbeing. One parent told us, 'my child likes the setting that makes them feel comfortable.'

Furnishings were of a high standard and staff helped ensure they were well looked after and well maintained, which helped children feel they matter. Consideration had been given to creating some cosy spaces, which offered children places to rest and relax, helping to support their wellbeing. For example, by adding blankets, cushions and soft lighting to the book area. We discussed cosy spaces could be further enhanced by adding more soft furnishings and developing the 'nurture room' to reflect a more sensory experience for children.

Children could choose from a variety of play spaces which met their interests. For example, block play, art area, woodwork and home area. We discussed how play spaces could be further enhanced by increasing the variety of and amount of toys and material to extend children's play and support curiosity, problem solving and creativity. Staff agreed that an increase of resources would benefit children and their development.

Children made use of free-flow access to outdoors, which supported their choices and wellbeing. Staff had considered how to make use of the cloakroom area rather than the sliding doors, to access to the garden in the winter months. This helped maintain a comfortable temperature indoors for children. Systems were in place to monitor and control heating and ventilation to support wellbeing.

The garden provided children with sensory opportunities to nurture their wellbeing and enjoyment of the natural world. The use of an outdoor toilet helped ensure children's play was not interrupted and they could return quickly to play. However, we noted that the toilet door was heavy and staff should consider how to ensure this is more accessible to children.

Some infection and prevention control measure were in place for example, hand washing, cleaning of playrooms and materials. We discussed that this could be enhanced further by improving storage of nappies in the changing areas to reflect best guidance. The service agreed to address this.

A variety of measures were in place to ensure children safety. For example, a secure entrance, safe storage of hazardous materials and good supervision. Staff identified through risk assessments that adjustments to the height of the garden fence and careful positioning of equipment would help reduce the likelihood of children climbing, providing additional safety for children. We agreed that this would further support a safe environment for children.

How good is our leadership? 4 - Good

Quality indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well.

We evaluated this key question as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Clear vision, values and aims were in place that supported the development of the service and helped staff know what was important for the setting. This included an approach where children were at the heart of decision making and to provide a safe, happy, caring and nurturing environment. This was shared with parents and clearly displayed within the nursery. One parent told us, 'they provide a safe and nurturing environment for children, allowing parents to work or take care of other responsibilities with peace of mind.'

The service had developed ways to involve families within the service and to help gather their views. For example, questionnaires, stay and play sessions and a parents' forum. This helped families to be involved in nursery life. However, parents told us they would to be more involved in the service and would like more information about their child's day. Managers and staff should consider how they can develop their approach to working partnerships with families to achieve positive outcomes for children. We discussed this under quality indicator 1.1.

The service had recently significantly increased the number of children that attended the service. Some families found this challenging for both their children and themselves as this was a much busier environment than they were used to. Whilst we observed children to be happy and settled in the environment, families were not always aware of this. Increasing communication would help involve and reassure families, as well as addressing any concern they may feel as the service adjusts to the changes.

The service had considered ways to offer individual support to families and developed a 'kindness cupboard'. This was stocked with food and clothing items, where families helped themselves to any items they need. This had been well used and was supported by local community businesses who helped replenish items.

Improvement plans were in place which identified how the service could improve opportunities to support children's wellbeing, literacy and numeracy development. For example, by tracking children progress and achievements. Staff engaged positively through the inspection process and were eager to take on board suggestions to help improve the service and outcomes for children. Discussions throughout the inspection will help inform future planning and support staff to reflect well together to evaluate what they do well and identity what they could do better as part of their continuous improvement.

Some monitoring systems were in place to help ensure outcomes for children were positive. This included reviewing personal plans, lunch experiences, accidents and incidents. We suggested that these should be further developed to ensure they identify gaps and lead to improvement. Staff told us they planned to audit the play areas to help ensure play materials met the needs of children to support high quality play.

How good is our staff team? 4 - Good

Quality Indicator 4.3: Staff deployment

We evaluated this key question as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

There had been recent changes to the staff following recruitment in response to the increase numbers of children attending. This helped ensure children were cared for by the right number of people, to help promote their wellbeing and ensure their safety. Some parents shared their concerns about the increased numbers and we encouraged the service to work with parents to address these concerns. Parents told us, 'It looks a busy nursery, but staff are always helpful and have a smile' and 'they are friendly and nice'. Staff told us, 'Our staff team has grown over the past few months. However, it feels like we have been together for a lot longer. Staff are dedicated and want what is best for the nursery and the children and families within it.'

New staff participated in induction processes and felt supported by the managers and staff team, which helped them settle into their role to provide care and experiences for children. Leaders welcomed the variety of skills and experience of staff group and were beginning to make effective use of differing skills and abilities. One staff member told us, 'The team have made me feel welcomed and a valued part of their team. All staff are very open new ideas and are excited to extend children's learning and knowledge while working with the children.'

Staff worked well together to build relationships with staff and children, helping to create a positive environment for children to play and learn. Staff were respectful of each other's ideas, sharing practice to help improve outcomes for children. Leadership roles had been established and were in the early stages of being developed to support developments of the service. For example, lending library lead and numeracy and literacy champion. One parent told us 'I believe the whole staff team build positive relationships with the children. It's so lovely to see so many children skipping into nursery in the morning, always greeted with a warm smile for the staff in the cloakroom.

Staff breaks were staggered and had been planned to help ensure children needs could be met. However, we noted that some routines and staff rotas could be reviewed to help provide more consistency for children to support children's wellbeing. For example, reviewing staff rotas for areas and over mealtimes. We observed during lunch time staff were more stretched at times to be able to effectively meet all children needs. We discussed this with staff, and they agreed to review how changes could be made to improve this process.

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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Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

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