Auchlone Nature Kindergarten
Day Care of Children

Auchlone Lodge
Abercairney Estate
Crieff
PH7 3QZ

Telephone: 01764 683656

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
25 April 2023

Service provided by:
Living Classrooms C.I.C.

Service provider number:
SP2021000107

Service no:
CS2021000179

About the service

Auchlone Nature Kindergarten is registered to provide a day care service for 75 children from the age of two to 12 years. The service is provided by Living Classrooms C.I.C and is in partnership with Perth and Kinross council to deliver funded early learning and childcare places.

The service is a fully outdoor kindergarten based on Abercairney Estate, three miles from Crieff. The Kindergarten operates from the woodland on the estate. The main site includes an outdoor kitchen facility and a small cottage. Further areas within the forest are accessed via foot.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced which took place on 24 April 2023 between 09:15 and 16:15. 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 previous inspection findings, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection. In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with children using the service
- received feedback from six families via MS Forms
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice
- reviewed documents

Key messages

• Children were cared for by staff who were warm, compassionate and nurturing supporting their wellbeing, play and learning.
• Children were empowered to be leaders of their own learning with effective responsive planning approaches in place.
• Children experienced challenging, and fun play experiences that promoted opportunities for creativity, curiosity, problem solving and risk assessing.
• Aspirational vision, values and aims captured the uniqueness of the setting, promoting a positive ethos for children, families and staff.

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?	5 - Very Good
How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
How good is our leadership?	5 - Very 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? 5 - Very Good

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

1.1 Nurturing care and support

Children experienced warm, caring and nurturing approaches to support their well-being. 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 very good at following cues from children and were quick to recognise if a child needed support. This supported children to form attachments with staff and feel secure in their care.

Children's wellbeing and care needs were effectively supported. Staff worked with families, involving them in decisions about their child's care and development. Most children's personal plans reflected their needs, and were supporting children to be healthy, nurtured, included, and to achieve.

Children experienced a calm and sociable lunchtime. They were responsible for collecting their own trays and cutlery and plating their packed lunch. Staff joined children eating which promoted good eating habits, manners and supported the sociable experience. Children happily engaged in conversation and told us what they had brought for lunch that day. Due to restrictions with the Kinderkitchen, the service were currently not serving or preparing food. The provider and manager were working to resolve this.

1.3 Play and learning

Children had fun as they experienced high quality play and learning. Staff demonstrated a genuine interest in supporting play as they valued the importance of children having fun. Staff interacted skilfully to support children's curiosities. This meant that interests were responded to in the moment as staff engaged with children to deepen the learning. As a result, children were happy, confident and were making progress. Parents echoed this with comments including, "our son is flourishing in his natural outdoor environment" and "children have the freedom to explore outdoors and play based learning".

Staff understood their role in supporting children's development and confidence in their own abilities. Interactions between staff and children were carefully considered and were respectful of children's rights, wishes and choices. Staff played with children when they were invited to do so and when they could see that this would support children's experiences. This approach supported children to play without unnecessary interruption and encouraged a deeper learning experience.

During interactions, staff modelled use of language and supported children's communication and thinking. Children solved problems as they navigated around the 'construction site' with a cart, pulling each other up the hill, taking turns to go down. As a result, children were challenged and developed confidence in their own abilities and risk taking.

This fully outdoor service encouraged children to make connections with nature. For example, children experienced awe and wonder as they excitedly searched for feathers from a jay bird. Children used a variety of natural resources to support their creativity and curiosity as they explored the woodland with confidence. This supported children to feel connected to nature. One parent told us, "Auchlone is a magical place - our son loves his "forest school" and I'm so pleased he gets to experience this in his younger years".

Opportunities for numeracy were extended through natural exploration of objects found within the kindergarten. Language and literacy opportunities were effectively supported through careful interactions from staff, this included offering story times for children to join should they wish. The kindergarten experience was songful, singing was also used to help children transition through parts of the day. This meant that children were progressing and supported to achieve their full potential.

Highly effective use of floor books ensured children were listened to. Planning approaches such as the use of 'talking mats' and 'talking tubs' ensured experiences were child led and responsive. This empowered children to be leaders of their own learning. Children were given ownership of their play and encouraged to be independent. This contributed to children being fully engaged in their play and learning.

How good is our setting? 5 - Very Good

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

Quality indicator 2.2 Children experience high quality facilities

Children experienced a kindergarten that had a wealth of opportunities to explore, investigate and discover. The natural environment at Auchlone provided children with daily opportunities for exercise and fresh air in all weathers. Children benefitted from a range of spaces across the site. For example, the 'lightning tree' and 'dragon tree' sites encouraged children to climb up or over, balance on, explore and develop confidence. The kinderkitchen provided a warm dry space for children and staff to come together, to eat and to relax. In addition, 'The cottage' provided an indoor, cosy, nurturing space for children to use should they need. This meant children could rest when they needed to. The site area was secure with fencing and clear boundaries in place. This contributed to keeping to children safe.

Children experienced challenging and fun play experiences in a safe way. Risk assessments and daily checks were carried out to promote a safe environment for all children who were meaningfully involved in risk assessing. For example, children were well supported by staff to identify and manage risks on their journey to the 'lightening tree'. As a result, children were learning important life skills and how to stay safe from experienced staff.

We saw that children were capable, confident, and happy outdoors. They had great fun exploring the environment, playing with their friends. They used the natural resources in different ways which supported imaginative play. One parent told us, "the days are full of play and adventure. Our child always comes home with bright eyes and a story to tell". Among many valuable opportunities children were learning to care for the kindergarten chickens. This contributed to children's high quality experiences.

There was a wealth of resources that children could access independently to support their play. For example, pans, sieves, jugs and bowls were readily available for children. This supported children to lead their own play and make choices.

Children experiences were enhanced as staff provided core resources and materials to support learning anywhere on site. For example, paint pens, wire, clips were easily accessible for staff to ensure experiences were age appropriate and allowed opportunities for play to be extended. This contributed to the very good experiences on offer for children.

How good is our leadership? 5 - Very Good

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

3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well

Children benefitted from a culture of continuous improvement. Effective policies, procedures and quality assurance processes were in place to support the development and improvement of the service. This supported positive outcomes for children and their families.

A shared vision, values and aims had been developed in consultation with staff and families. These were aspirational and captured the uniqueness of the setting which contributed to the positive ethos. The service valued opinions and involvement of children and their families. Regular feedback from families took place through a variety of methods such as face to face discussions, questionnaires and feedback requests.

A realistic improvement plan was driving forward nursery developments. Priorities were outcome focussed with realistic targets. Staff were involved in reviewing and evaluating the improvement plan as part of their team meetings. These opportunities ensured that everyone working in the service felt valued and listened to as part of the service's ongoing improvement work. This contributed to a positive team ethos and a sense of shared purpose and vision.

Children and staff were fully involved in the self-evaluation process. Effective use of best practice documents was supporting the overall evaluation of key performance indicators. This supported staff to be reflective in their practice and make informed changes to improve outcomes for children.

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, therefore we evaluated this quality key question as very good.

4.3 Staff deployment

Children were cared for by staff who were warm, compassionate and nurturing. Staff provided individualised support by effectively engaging with children throughout the inspection. Staff demonstrated an awareness of when and how to effectively intervene, picking up on cues to support children's wellbeing and extend their play experiences. This resulted in children who felt respected within the service.

Effective staff deployment across the service meant that the right number of staff were meeting children's individual needs, consistently throughout the day. Staff were proactive in recognising any gaps and ensuring effective supervision and quality engagement with children. Staff placed themselves thoughtfully during busier times to ensure all children's individual needs were well considered. As a result, children benefitted from a very calm and positive experience. All staff communicated well and in a respectful manner to ensure children's needs were met consistently across the day. This contributed to children being respected and created a positive team ethos within the service.

Staff were respectful and supportive of each other. This created a positive environment for children and families. Staff had undertaken relevant training that had developed their skills in nature pedagogy. This contributed to the very good care and support of children. All staff were welcoming and engaged throughout the inspection. There was a strong sense of team work. Staff spoke positively about the relationships and team working ethos within the service. They felt valued and listened to, which had created a sense of pride in their work. The strong team working ethos contributed to a positive and caring environment for children and families.

Complaints

Please see Care Inspectorate website (www.careinspectorate.com) for details of complaints about the service which have been upheld.

Detailed evaluations

How good is our care, play and learning?	5 - Very Good
1.1 Nurturing care and support	5 - Very Good
1.3 Play and learning	5 - Very Good

How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	5 - Very Good

How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	5 - Very Good

How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good
4.3 Staff deployment	5 - Very Good

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