Hopefield Nursery Class
Day Care of Children

Riddochhill Road
Blackburn
EH47 7HB

Telephone: 01506 653481

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
8 September 2023

Service provided by:
West Lothian Council

Service provider number:
SP2003002601

Service no:
CS2022000320

About the service

Hopefield Nursery class is registered to provide an early learning and childcare service to 53 children aged two years to entry into primary school, of whom no more than 10 will be aged 2-3 years at any one time. The registered manager is also the registered manager of Murrayfield Primary School Nursery.

The service is provided by West Lothian Council and offers funded early learning and childcare to eligible children.

Situated in Blackburn, it is housed within Blackburn Primary School within secure grounds. The accommodation consists of a large playroom, toilets, a cloakroom and office space. Local bus routes service the area and on-street parking is available.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Tuesday 5 September between 09:00 and 16:30. We returned on 6 September 2023 between 08:30 and 15:50. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate. This inspection took place as a response to two incidents we were notified about. As part of our inspection, we assessed the issues that led to the incidents and the actions taken by the service since.

To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included previous inspection findings, registration information, 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 and received digital feedback from two families
- spoke with staff and the senior leadership team
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents
- spoke with one visiting professional.

We returned to give feedback to the service and provider on Friday 8 September 2023.

Key messages

Following two incidents, the service had taken action to ensure the safety of all children using the service.

Children were cared for with warmth and compassion by adults who took an interest in what was right for them.

A newly forming staff team were committed to making improvements for children and had formed strong relationships with the local community.

Whilst planning systems to promote children's learning and development were mostly effective, there were some gaps in children's observations and next steps to ensure progress over time.

The service should continue to develop the environment to ensure all children have access to inspiring and stimulating play and learning experiences at all 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?	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, when taken together, clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support

Children had developed positive relationships with each other and staff. Staff interacted with warmth and kindness and were mostly responsive to children's needs. As a result, children felt nurtured and safe. Overall, children experienced a friendly, calm, and supportive atmosphere. One parent said, "The staff are fantastic. You can see they are passionate about their jobs and love the kids. My child loves this nursery".

When children needed support or comfort, staff mostly responded to their cues. Children were being supported by wellbeing initiatives to support their transition into nursery. This included work around emotions combined with yoga and mindfulness exercises to support a softer start on arrival. This helped give structure to children's arrival and made them feel included.

Children developed a sense of pride and wellbeing as staff encouraged and praised them. Staff knowledge of children helped them to provide more individualised support. Communication with children's families made this more effective. However, some children would benefit from more guidance and support. For example, some presented as lost within the environment, or passive and looking at their peers. These were missed opportunities to engage with children and provide supportive and encouraging interactions.

Meals and snacks were largely positive experiences with children being able to develop independence through self-serving, with support from staff if they required it. It was mostly a relaxed and sociable experience. Some staff sat with children, enabling skills development in language, communication, and table etiquette. Although children had other opportunities to influence the pace and routines of the day, at this time children were brought together in a group to tidy up and get ready for lunch. This interrupted the flow of the day for some children. Likewise, children were split into groups where one group was taken outside. To ensure all transition points are as child led as possible and respect children's choices, flexibility around these times of the day should be reviewed. We discussed some missed opportunities around helping to plan and prepare foods, or to use the large kitchen throughout the day as part of children's ongoing play and learning experiences.

Sleep routines for those children who required it could be improved. The environment was not conducive to rest as it was noisy and busy. Some children became distressed when they woke, and as staff were elsewhere there were missed opportunities for staff to comfort and support them.

All children had a personal plan in place with required consents which were regularly reviewed with families. Staff were generally knowledgeable about children, their needs, and strategies of support. This demonstrated their interest in what mattered to children. At times however, this was not reflected clearly within personal plans. This impacted on the provision of consistent care and staff being able to monitor and evaluate strategies over time, particularly as it was a newly forming staff team. We found gaps in personal plans around being proactive in planning for those children who may be care experienced or some who have additional support needs. Some further planning was in place, but key strategies or targets from any child planning meetings and visiting professionals should be more easily accessible to all staff within personal plans. They should be measured for impact so that all children are making progress at a pace that is right for them.

Quality indicator 1.3 Play and Learning

Overall, children were engaged, and in some instances leading their own learning. There was fun and laughter as children negotiated, experimented, and created together. For example, in the outdoor area, the water tray sparked curiosity and exploration through a mixture of resources and tools to experiment with concepts such as filling, emptying, volume and flow. Children were able to help themselves to water from an outdoors tap, allowing them to lead their own play and learning. There were some missed opportunities to plan and provide for the mix of ages and stages and the different types of play and learning taking place. Some staff didn't recognise or understand children's current interests or patterns of learning. As a result, children's curiosity or exploration was hindered or stopped. Staff should continue to develop their knowledge of the adult role and how to effectively support and extend children's play and learning. This would contribute to ensuring children's progress over time and ensure it reflects their current interests and stage of development.

Children's learning was often supported through staff asking effective questions to stimulate their thinking skills. For example, one staff member encouraged some children to look for insects outside, and listened to children as they discussed what they might need to eat. However, this approach among all staff was inconsistent, resulting in missed opportunities to develop sustained and shared interest. Making this more consistent would enhance opportunities for children to consider, examine, make decisions, express opinions and problem solve. This would add to children's wonder and to securing their progress over time.

Effective planning systems were in place to support and promote children's progress. This was informed by observations of individual children as well as tracking systems looking at progress and interests over time. This resulted in an approach which was child centred and responsive to children's learning and life experiences. Breadth of learning across the early level curriculum was clear and this had been linked into the national wellbeing indicators and the UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child), reflecting national and local priorities. This provided opportunities for children to engage in a variety of experiences as well as begin to understand and respect their rights for themselves and each other.

Observations and assessments in learning journals were effective in highlighting significant learning and in some reflecting the child's voice in the process. Auditing of these resulted in supporting staff to provide high quality observations to support development. Some inconsistency was seen in the identification of next steps, and in some observations being followed up in planning. There were also some children with long gaps between observations. This meant there were missed opportunities to track and progress play and learning at a pace that is right for each child. Observations should be regular to ensure there is an ongoing understanding of where each child is at in their play and learning, and then fed into planning and assessment over time.

How good is our setting? 4 - Good

We made an evaluation of good for this key question, as several important strengths, when taken together, clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

2.2 Children experience high quality facilities.

Children were welcomed into a bright, calm, open plan setting. There was plenty of natural light and ventilation contributing to children's wellbeing, and mostly free-flow access to the good-sized outdoors area. Distinct areas for play were set up offering a range of experiences, and resources were accessible to children to enable them to lead their own learning.

More should now be done to enhance the environment to reflect and inspire children's interests and invite creativity and learning across the curriculum. For example, in the home corner, real items should be introduced to stimulate play and learning experiences. Examples are crockery, baking materials, boxes of food items or loose parts to inspire and spark imagination. Resources to support literacy development were starting to be used and should continue to evolve. Some examples to include might be menus, diaries, calendars, and a variety of mark making materials. There was a lack of items to develop sensory play, such as sand. Inclusion of this type of play would provide for a mix of ages and patterns of play and learning. All areas would now benefit from inputting loose parts and natural, real items to enhance creativity and curiosity. Staff should consider how best to provoke learning to develop intrigue, as well as promoting literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing across the environment. Areas should be regularly restored and replenished throughout the day to keep areas inviting and stimulating, as well as enable children to try out new concepts and ideas. This would ensure enhancements would contribute to the continuous provision of high quality play and learning experiences **(see area for improvement 1).**

Outdoors was inviting and well used. There were opportunities for children to be active and develop motor skills through the climbing frame and the balance beams for example. Some children were having a cosy, nurturing time with staff whilst listening to a story, contributing to literacy development and a calming experience. Others experimented with water and were absorbed in their experiences. More loose parts could now be introduced to encourage construction, problem solving and creativity, as well as bikes to further enhance the development of motor skills and act on children's feedback. One child told us, "I want to play on the bikes, but they're in the other area".

Following two incidents, further steps had been taken to keep children safe in the setting, and to prevent them from being able to leave the setting unattended. Registers were in place, and doors were checked regularly throughout the day with areas monitored by staff. This meant staff were aware of the whereabouts and therefore safety of children. Accident and incidents were recorded and shared with parents as well as being monitored to identify recurring themes. This allowed risks to be minimised for children. Children and staff washed hands at appropriate times and staff engaged in touch point cleaning. We identified some areas for the service to consider around infection prevention and control, to further reduce the risk of infection to children. These included ensuring floor cushions are not used for sleeping, and aprons and gloves in nappy changing areas should be in lidded boxes. Staff should also be aware of outbreak timescales so that children's play and learning experiences are not affected over a long period of time, such as sand and water being restricted.

Areas for improvement

1. To promote challenge, curiosity and enhance children's play experiences, improvements should be made to the range and quality of resources and experiences provided for children. These should be regularly restored and replenished throughout the day to keep areas inviting and stimulating, as well as enable children to try out new concepts and ideas. This would ensure continuous provision of high quality play and learning experiences.

This is to ensure care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'As a child, my social and physical skills, confidence, self-esteem and creativity are developed through a balance of organised and freely chosen extended play, including using open ended and natural materials' (HSCS 1.31)

How good is our leadership? 4 - Good

We made an evaluation of good for this key question, as several important strengths, when taken together, clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well.

A shared vision, values and aims was positively informing practice. Leaders and staff were involved with families as well as school staff and children in the creation of these. It was clear how important this was to the service and how it informed the work of the nursery in the wider community, for example in the creation of family learning initiatives such as 'feed the family for a fiver'. This was having a positive impact on family engagement within the nursery.

Staff were beginning to be empowered to lead on their interests and skillset. This was in early discussion stages but showed capacity to initiate well informed change and share responsibility for the process. For example, in the development of forest kindergarten practices or in additional supports for learning.

The service was developing processes to seek family's views so they could be acted on to inform the development of the setting. Parents were encouraged into the setting at points throughout the day and a variety of stay and play and family events were planned. We signposted the team to the new practice document from the Care Inspectorate coming out soon to develop this further, 'Me, my family and my early learning and childcare setting'.

Systems were in place to support continuous improvement. The service was currently in a transitional phase due to moving premises, having a newly forming staff team as well as a new head teacher to the school. Leaders and staff had focused on creating a positive culture within the team that supported improvement. Staff were beginning to engage in some informal discussion and reflection around improvements. Leaders were confident that planned quality assurance processes would continue to build staff capacity to empower them to self-evaluate, embed, and sustain improvements, for example, through room audits and a shared improvement plan. Moving forward, the staff team should further develop reflection on their practice using best practice documents such as Realising the Ambition (Education Scotland 2020) and include feedback from families and children to support ongoing developments. This will help them to focus on priority issues as well as those areas acknowledged in this report, such as developing the environment to promote enjoyment and extend play and learning opportunities; and developing interactions to extend and facilitate play and learning. This would ensure improving children's outcomes are always kept at the heart of improvement planning.

Children were being safeguarded from harm by the service effectively monitoring concerns and working with other agencies where necessary. However, notifying the Care Inspectorate of such concerns is required. We signposted the service to the Care Inspectorate document 'Records that all registered care services must keep and guidance on notification and reporting'. This should also be made available to staff to ensure they are compliant with regulatory responsibilities.

How good is our staff team? 4 - Good

We made an evaluation of good for this key question, as several important strengths, when taken together, clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

4.3 Staff deployment

Deployment and levels of staff were mostly effective, which contributed to good outcomes for children. Recommended ratios of staff to children were met and there was a good mix of experience and qualifications across the staff team. Staff were welcoming, calm and mostly vigilant. They communicated well with each other to ask for support to cover areas when they had to leave the room, for example to do personal care for a child. Rotas had been planned to enable staff to move around different areas of the playroom each week, bringing fresh ideas and variety for staff and children. Staff meetings allowed for staff to engage in professional dialogue, and these were minuted to keep all staff informed and involved if their shift patterns didn't allow for attendance at meetings.

There were some times of the day when staff could improve on their deployment. Examples were at transition points such as lunch time when having less staff available had an impact on children's experiences, such as having to close the outdoor area. Staff breaks could be reviewed to allow for this to be minimised. On the day of inspection, when children slept, staff were not on hand to offer comfort and support when they woke, resulting in children becoming distressed. At times, in busier areas of the playroom, there were missed opportunities for staff to support children in areas of their social and emotional development when disputes arose. Staff should continue to work together to ensure all areas of the playroom are deployed effectively at busier times of the day. This would ensure children get the best support they need at all times.

All staff were confident in their roles and responsibilities and felt they were deployed to make the best use of their skills and expertise. This resulted in positive experiences for most children. The service was making use of the Scottish Government Early Learning and Childcare National Induction resource to support new staff to reflect on their practice and consider improvements. As this is a newly forming team we discussed the value in all staff using this as a team to help shape and support reflections moving forwards and help the formation of a shared approach over the coming years.

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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