Lauriston Castle Forest Kindergarten
Day Care of Children

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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
10 October 2024

Service provided by:
City of Edinburgh Council

Service provider number:
SP2003002576

Service no:
CS2023000103

About the service

Lauriston Castle Forest Kindergarten is registered to provide a daycare of children's service to a maximum of 20 children aged between 3 years and primary school entry at any one time.

The manager is also the manager of Corstorphine Hill Forest Kindergarten, Cammo Forest Kindergarten and Queensferry Forest Kindergarten.

The service is located in the grounds of Lauriston Castle where they have use of a designated space outdoors for the main base and use of the grounds for adventures during the day. Outdoor toilet and changing facilities are provided outdoors at the main base camp area. There is also access to indoor facilities within the Steward's house building for staff breaks and meetings with toilets, kitchen and a playroom for use with children in adverse weather conditions.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Monday 7 October 2024 between the hours of 09:10 and 16:35 . We returned on Tuesday 8 October 2024 between the hours of 08:20 and 16:00 to continue with the inspection. 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 since registration.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke to and interacted with children using the service
- spoke with staff and the manager
- observed practice, daily routines and children's experiences
- reviewed documents relating to children's care and the management of the service
- took into account feedback from 11 families via an online survey we issued.

We provided feedback to the manager, senior early years officer and a quality improvement education officer from the local authority on Thursday 10 October 2024.

Key messages

- Children's health and wellbeing was supported as staff knew children in their care well and effectively used children's personal plan information to ensure their needs were known and planned for.
- Children's interests and confidence were supported through the varied outdoor experiences and staff interactions throughout the day.
- Quality assurance processes supported a continuous culture of improvement and helped promote positive outcomes for children. Ongoing audits of the service will continue to support self evaluation and enhance outcomes for children.
- The deployment of staff ensured children's care and support needs were consistently and effectively supported throughout the 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?	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 key question as very good.

Quality indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support

Children's wellbeing and experiences were supported by all staff who provided warm, caring and nurturing approaches. Staff clearly knew children in their care well and the support needed to help them engage in their play and settle into the environment. For example, cuddles and reassurance were given as well as encouragement and help with turn taking and use of the toilet area. This helped children to be secure, confident and encouraged independence.

Feedback we received from families included, "Staff are always friendly, approachable and caring towards the children. They are always there to answer any questions or to give feedback on my child", "The staff team are great and I feel I can chat to them about anything. They are so friendly and open and always willing to comfort kids at drop-off if needed. I feel my daughter and us as parents have a really good relationship with them" and "We discuss any items at morning and drop off. The staff know my child so well. Anything I communicate on is followed up on a timely basis".

Children experienced outdoor mealtimes that were unhurried and relaxed. At lunch times, a hot meal was provided and staff sat with children to support social interactions, provide help when needed and to maintain safety. For example, ensuring dietary needs were met. Children were supported to be independent and learn new skills by learning to use cutlery and self serve their own foods and drinks with staff support. Moving forward, the service planned further changes as well as ongoing observations to help assess and enhance children's experiences. For example, provision of bench seating for children rather than the logs for comfort and ensuring a consistent staff approach to support children's access to drinks at mealtimes. Feedback from some families, included, "I don't always like the lunches and snack" and "I'd prefer if real meat was given, rather than Quorn!." The service was receptive to this feedback and further engagement with families was to continue about the food menus and reassurance about alternative options being provided if children disliked foods.

Personal plan information was used effectively to support children's overall health and wellbeing. For example, planning and supporting children's individual strategies of support, medical and allergy needs. This information was reviewed in consultation with families to ensure this was kept up to date and enabled staff to be able to respond quickly and sensitively to any changes. Moving forward, the personal plan information was to continue to be quality assured by the management team to support a consistent approach for documenting information by all staff. This would ensure that children continued to get the planned support needed to reach their full potential.

Quality indicator 1.3: Play and learning

Children were confident in their environment and had fun through a variety of play, learning and development opportunities which promoted their choice, creativity and imagination. Experiences included, arts/crafts, swinging and climbing, games, storytelling and loose parts play resources to support imaginative play and adventures in the wider grounds as well as the local community.

Feedback from families about what their child liked about the service included, "Going on adventures with my forest friends, splashing in puddles, making pictures." and "The environment, the staff engagement, the variety of activities, the communication".

Children's play experiences and staff skilled interactions helped developed children's skills in language, literacy and numeracy. For example, problem solving together to adjust the height of the hammocks, measuring their heights, books and singing. Sign language and visual timetables also supported inclusion, reminded children of the boundaries and supported children's transitions throughout the day.

Planning approaches were child centred and responsive to their current interests. This along with staff engagement helped provide a stimulating environment, and support children to learn new skills and knowledge. For example, learning to mix the paint to make new colours and reading non fiction books with staff. As a result, children were engaged and confident in their play. Staff observations and interactions with children helped assess children's progress and identify achievements and next steps for learning. This information was shared with families through parental consultations and learning journals. Moving forward, further training for staff was planned to support their confident use of floor books and learning journals to outline children's learning and progress.

Feedback from families included, "I use learning journals to add things about her development and worked up a personal plan with her key worker", "I was blown away by the observations by staff at the parent check ins. They have an in depth understanding of him, his abilities and areas for development which they work on with him" and "Good feedback and discussions around progress, how they are getting on and their relationships with other children. This is done in a nice open manner which promotes discussion as well as through learning journals and the parent meetings".

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 key question as very good.

Quality indicator 2.2: Children experience high quality facilities

Children benefitted from a welcoming outdoor environment which provided children with a variety of different play types and opportunities. This included providing cosy space and sheltered areas that they could enjoy activities in all weathers. Spaces were well defined to support continuity for children each day. For example, specific areas for mealtimes, toilets and storytelling. Children could also enjoy going on adventures within the grounds with staff for other activities such as games, splashing in puddles and climbing. These experiences helped to maintain children's engagement, curiosity and extend their learning opportunities.

Children safety and wellbeing was supported through ongoing risk assessments of the base camp and activities in the surrounding area. Staff and children worked well together to identify and minimise potential risks. This helped children to learn how to keep themselves safe. For example, children and staff met together each morning to discuss daily reminders and children placed visual markers for the boundary areas for play. When children and staff left the base camp to go on adventures, children wore high visibility tops. Children could opt to be the leader or ender of the group with staff. This was a responsible job that they enjoyed and they carried leader and ender sticks as a visual boundary reminder to support their peers when walking together. Staff also regularly head counted throughout the day to ensure children were accounted for at all times.

Depending on the weather and tree canopy, some areas of the base camp were darker and children commented on this to staff when they were taking part in some art activities. Staff discussed with the children about ideas and plans to add further lighting. For example, fairy lights. During restricted daylight hours, although headtorches would be used, we discussed that further lighting would also support some other areas to be more welcoming. For example, the book and toilet areas.

Children's heath and wellbeing was supported as robust infection control and food safety practices were in place. This included handwashing stations and children being reminded to wash hands their before eating and after using the toilet.

An indoor space was available to use for contingency measures to support the safety of children. For example, during high winds and lightning during the session when the base camp could not be used. Moving forward, a clearer approach was needed for staff and families about when and how the indoor contingency space would be used with children. This space should also be effectively maintained to ensure this was clean and comfortable for children's use at short notice. The service was responsive to this feedback and this was to be taken forward as part the quality assurance processes by the management team.

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 key question as very good.

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

There was a shared vision, values and aims for the service and these had recently been reviewed in consultation with families and staff. This along with staff training had helped inform staff practice. A development plan outlined the priorities for the service and this was shared with families. This along with cuppa chats, consultations, stay and play opportunities and events as well as sharing information online all helped support family engagement, build on relationships and provide feedback opportunities.

Children's views were routinely sought through daily discussions with staff which helped influence change and their experiences. For example, children were helping to plan the craft day for families and their requests for additional resources to enhance their play were actioned.

Self evaluation was supported through a variety of processes including planned quality assurance audits carried out by the management team. Team meetings, leadership meetings, best practice site visits, staff individual support meetings and audits of children's experiences provided opportunities for staff to reflect on their practice and identify areas for improvement or training to enhance their skills and experiences for children.

The manager was also the named peripatetic manager for other local authority services and the senior early years officer also worked in another outdoor setting. Therefore a quality assurance calendar had been developed to support the progression of the development plan, self evaluation processes and audits of the service. This further supported a culture of continuous improvement. For example, management had identified further training for staff to support their skills for recording children's progress and learning through the floor books and online learning journals. Ongoing audits and observations of staff practice and

children's experiences would also help measure the impact of any training and ensure any changes to practice were consistently sustained.

Feedback from families included, "Our opinions and feedback is asked for to help improve the service" and "Daily opportunities for discussion, there are lots of chances for stay and play or visits to the setting". Other feedback we received regarding how the service could be improved included, "More funding for resources, better food - not specific to this setting though".

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 key question as very good.

Quality indicator 4.3: Staff deployment

The staff team's skilled interactions and respectful approach meant that children received compassionate and responsive care. As a result, children were confident or being supported by staff to gain confidence in the environment.

Staff worked well together as a team and communicated effectively when moving to different areas or leaving the outdoor space. This ensured effective support and supervision for children was maintained. There was a staff rota for designated roles such as mealtime routines, toilet support and supporting individual children needs. Moving forward, observations and audits of staff practice as part of the self evaluation processes would ensure a consistent approach for children when changes to the roles were made.

Feedback from families included, "The teachers simply couldn't be better. They are the best we have experienced for our children", "Just to say this is a wonderful setting and I am grateful every day that my boy has the opportunity to spend time here with caring and patient staff", "Well staffed service and ratios seem better than in other settings that she has attended" and "They are all very friendly. I know some better than others".

Children's wellbeing and safety were supported as the management team recognised the importance of the service being appropriately staffed. For example, additional staff were deployed in the setting to take account of the fully outdoor setting, individual needs of children, the spaces used and busy lunchtime routines. This meant that staff experiences and skills effectively supported children's experiences across the day. Arrangements were in place to consider staff absences and staff breaks were planned to minimise the impact on children's experiences. Supply staff were not always available from the local authority and absences were covered by the management team or staff from other sites. This consistent approach also enabled the management team to get to know families and provide pastoral care support when needed. Moving forward, the welcoming area was to be further developed to clearly outline to parents who is onsite each day so they know who is caring for their child.

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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