

# Poppies Pre-School Ltd Day Care of Children

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**Type of inspection:**  
Unannounced

**Completed on:**  
29 March 2023

**Service provided by:**  
Poppies Pre-School Ltd

**Service provider number:**  
SP2006008567

**Service no:**  
CS2006134446

## About the service

Poppies Pre-school Ltd is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 42 children at any one time aged from birth to those not yet attending primary school of whom no more than nine may be under two years of age. The service is based in the town of Laurencekirk. The building is on one floor with direct access to a secure garden area. There are two playrooms which are used flexibly to meet children's individual needs and capabilities.

## About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 28 and 29 March 2023. Two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate carried out the inspection.

To prepare for 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:

- received feedback by email from ten parents of children who attended
- spoke with the parents, children, staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

## Key messages

- Staff were consistently nurturing, caring and respectful.
- Children received excellent support from staff who were attuned to children's needs and highly responsive. It was clear that positive attachments had been formed.
- Families were at the heart of the service and were welcomed into the service to join groups and for stay and play sessions.
- Staff were highly skilled and experienced in meeting the needs of all children and supporting them to progress and achieve.
- Children experienced a warm, nurturing, exciting and stimulating environment. Spaces were richly resourced and sensitively structured to meet children's needs.
- Children had ownership of their experiences and influenced their play.
- Effective quality assurance procedures and self-evaluation supported high quality provision and influenced continuous improvements.
- The passionate and enthusiastic team were committed to delivering high quality experiences for children and families.

## 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?	6 - Excellent
How good is our setting?	6 - Excellent
How good is our leadership?	6 - Excellent
How good is our staff team?	6 - Excellent

Further details on the particular areas inspected are provided at the end of this report.

## How good is our care, play and learning?

6 - Excellent

We evaluated this key question as excellent, where performance was sector leading with outstandingly high outcomes for children

### Quality Indicator 1.1 - Nurturing care and support

Interactions between staff and children were warm, caring and nurturing. Staff recognised the importance of supporting and regulating children's emotions and as a result children enjoyed lots of cuddles from loving and caring staff. One parent shared, "the staff engage in a warm, positive way and my child has built strong relationships with several staff members. They love waving to them through the window on our walk into Poppies and talk about them at home in a lovely joyful way".

Staff had an in-depth understanding of children's needs and were knowledgeable about strategies in place to support children. This was embedded within staff practice. Staff supported children with additional support needs consistently and had developed their own skills and learning to use strategies and tools to support children. For example, there was consistent use of Makaton and visual aids to support children to achieve and progress.

Children and families were at the heart of the service, which enabled staff to know children well and develop positive relationships with parents. A high level of support was offered to families. Staff recognised that all families have different needs, and the team supported these exceptionally to ensure inclusion for all using the service. The service had recently received funding from the Froebel Trust to support a research project in relation to inclusion for all children. Any strategies or support offered was carried out in a flexible and mindful manner to ensure privacy, dignity and respect. The wellbeing of children and their families was clearly at the heart of the service. One parent shared, "the staff have been very supportive towards us as a new family to the area and have always been happy to give advice on my child's wellbeing or administrative matters such as accessing childcare funding".

Transitions were recognised as a significant process in children's lives. These were planned to be seamless, supportive and as natural as possible. A tailored and sensitive approach in partnership with parents, was taken to children settling in. One parent shared with us, "the settling in period was gradual and appropriate and was led by a consistent staff member".

The two playrooms were used flexibly to meet children's needs. For example, some of the older children in the baby room could choose which playroom they wished to be in and 'travelled' between areas when they wished. Transitions to school were also recognised as an experience that could have a significant impact on children and staff took time to support this transition effectively. For example, staff gifted each child a small mouse they could take in their pockets to school. This linked to a story that staff shared with children in the nursery and offered a safe, comforting object of reference.

Staff and parents completed children's personal plans together to ensure staff had all the information they required to be able to fully meet children's needs effectively. Parents shared that they were involved in developing these plans with the staff. These plans were reviewed at least six-monthly to ensure all information held by the service is current. Some children had additional plans in place should they require any additional support. Plans were detailed and identified specific strategies to support children's individual needs.

The staff team were highly skilled in liaising with other professionals to ensure effective strategies and support were put in place to meet the changing needs of children. This ensured that high quality, appropriate play and learning experiences and challenging and stimulating environments were consistently provided throughout the service. This enhanced positive outcomes for children.

Medication processes were robust and parents were supported to complete all required paperwork. Medication documents were reviewed weekly by staff and monthly by senior management to ensure safe practice. This also ensured that current information was held to meet all health and wellbeing needs of children.

Cosy, sensory spaces were available and regularly used for children to sleep or relax throughout their day. Younger children could choose when they wanted to sleep and were encouraged to help set their mattress and blanket for sleep. Staff were responsive to children who may require rest and offered cuddles when sought. Nurturing care and quality interactions supported children to rest and fall asleep, at their own pace, in an inviting and safe space.

Meals and snack were healthy and nutritious and dietary requirements were met. Children and families were included in menu planning. Snack times and mealtimes were well considered and offered valuable learning and social experiences for children. Children of all ages were fully involved in the whole mealtime experience. For example, all children were empowered to develop their independence and life skills as they helped prepare their own snack and children of all ages could self-serve their lunches. Staff sat with children at mealtimes and engaged with them, promoting discussions and delivering high levels of supervision.

### **Quality Indicator 1.3 - Play and learning**

The service supports a Froebelian ethos and children were at the heart of all planning. This was focussed on developing skills for life. Children were recognised as capable and responsible and were developing a love of learning through play experiences. For example, older children were encouraged to be responsible by supporting the babies over the lunch and sleep period. They told us they enjoyed this responsibility as they sat with them at the lunch tables and then soothed the babies to sleep. Children of all ages were also involved in tidying up, looking after the garden and feeding the birds.

Staff provided a balance of adult initiated play and learning and responding to children's current interests. Staff were highly skilled in observing children's play, extending their current interests and providing provocations to encourage intentional play and learning. As part of the planning cycle, staff had regular meetings and daily huddles where they discussed individual children's interests. These supported staff to share information and support highly responsive planning.

Staff had undertaken training on slow pedagogy and the pace of the day was relaxed, unhurried and led by children's interest. Children engaged in uninterrupted free flow play throughout almost all of the session. This allowed them to lead their play and independently select resources of their choice. This supported children to explore and learn at a pace that was right for them.

Children were engaged in sustained high quality play experiences with their friends. Children problem solved and collaborated to build and create in the construction area. For example, children worked together making towers, ramps and chutes from the loose parts.

Literacy, numeracy and mathematical language was developed by the children throughout their play, for example, children spoke about height, size, quantities and what they would need to make their chute higher. Staff were responsive to children's language as they supported and extended children's vocabulary. Critical thinking skills were developed through skilled and effective questioning from staff.

Children were effectively challenged through a wide range of high-quality resources both indoors and out. One parent shared, "my child clearly has great access to outdoor space and interesting activities such as making a fire. She really enjoys these more adventurous activities and often asks to do them at home too since starting at Poppies. I have been impressed with her level of confidence in negotiating tasks such as building bridges together out of planks of wood, and I think this must come from the outdoor play and loose parts play at Poppies".

Outdoors, children engaged in digging with shovels and using wheelbarrows to transport their mud around. Staff supported play and engaged with children's interest in jumping in puddles. Staff used effective questioning to support and develop children's thinking skills and staff were aware of individual needs and varied the language used with children by using single words or more complex simple sentences.

Learning journals contained learning stories with a focus on the conversation between the child and the staff. Next steps within learning and development were clear and specific and were taken forward by the staff team to support children's progression and achievement. Staff had done a lot of training and research into schemas, and these were evident through the stories. Children took great delight in sharing their journals with us, pointing out all the fun and exciting activities they were involved in. Floor books also showcased the child's voice, consultations with children, children's interests and the skills they had developed through a wide range of play and learning experiences.

Families were encouraged to be a part of their child's learning experiences. This supported the sharing of learning between nursery and home. Learning groups regularly took place which families could join. This included stay and play sessions and family picnics. These opportunities ensured that families were a big part of the nursery and could be a part of their child's play and learning.

The service had built excellent links with their local community. Children regularly visited the local shops, care home and café. Regular visitors to the nursery included a librarian, the community police and a pupil from the local Academy visiting the nursery each week to play with the children. This supported the children to develop a greater awareness of their local community and allowed them to share experiences with pupils from a local school, which promoted the development of social skills, literacy and communication.

## How good is our setting?

**6 - Excellent**

We evaluated this key question as excellent, where performance was sector leading with outstandingly high outcomes for children.

### Quality Indicator 2.2 - Children experience high quality facilities

The setting was warm, welcoming and inviting for the children and families. It was evident that children mattered, and they had been valued and respected throughout the development of this high-quality learning environment. Thought had been given to lighting, and table lamps provided a softer environment throughout the whole nursery.

A cosy nurture room offered opportunities for quieter activities and for rest and relaxation. Soft furnishings, including rugs and cushions for children to sit on, provided a homely environment. Children relaxed here, looked at a very good variety of books and played with the puppets and story sacks.

The environment had been well thought out and planned to sensitively meet the needs of all children and their families. There were excellent opportunities for children to take part in high quality play experiences within all play areas. This included sewing, construction, art, crafts and woodwork. Natural resources were evident throughout each area.

The environment for the younger children was nurturing, warm and inviting and provided a spacious environment for children to develop gross motor skills, develop curiosities and be creative. High quality resources which were appropriate for the children's age and stage of development provided a vast array of learning opportunities to support play and learning.

The outdoors provided a safe and secure space for children to explore, play and learn. This area was well resourced with purposeful and meaningful resources to support children's play and learning. Children took part in creative play, construction and active play experiences during their outdoor play. Children benefitted from a range of surfaces outdoors to support their play. Children could access grass, paved areas, concrete surfaces, mud areas and a decked area. Children were taking part in planting and growing, and each had a grow bag. Children were encouraged to care for the garden and their plants and vegetables, promoting a sense of responsibility.

Risk assessments were in place for all areas of the service and were reviewed regularly to minimise any possible risks. This ensured a safe environment for children, staff and families. Accidents and incidents were recorded in detail and were shared with families. These were audited every month to highlight any patterns and trends. Prompt actions were taken by the service to adapt the environment if required to support children's safety. The service submitted notifications to the Care Inspectorate, when required, to inform us of specific accidents or incidents.

## How good is our leadership?

**6 - Excellent**

We evaluated this key question as excellent, where performance was sector leading with outstandingly high outcomes for children

### Quality Indicator 3.1 - Quality assurance and improvement are led well

Children and families had been involved in a consultation to review of the vision, values, and aims for the setting. "Our aim is to provide a high-quality learning environment which engages children fully both indoors and outdoors and into the wider community. Our resources are well thought out and in the main open-ended which allows for rich, complex play".

The service strived to continually improve and provide an excellent service for families and ongoing research projects were naturally embedded within practice and supported positive outcomes for children.

An improvement plan identified clear areas for development, which included leadership and emotional regulation. Staff had meaningful roles within the plan, which included clear goals and their impact, success criteria, regular reviews and successes and achievements. The plan was linked to current best practice. This approach ensured that staff were fully involved in all ongoing improvements to further enhance positive outcomes for children.

Self-evaluation of the service was well led and of outstandingly high quality to support ongoing reflections and development of practice, interactions and the environment. Children, families and staff were highly involved in this approach through surveys, questionnaires, stay and plays and discussions. Information was collated and suggestions taken forward were shared with everyone involved. Parents shared that they were involved in consultations and felt listened to. Children were also included in self-evaluation and were regularly asked for their feedback.

Regular monitoring was undertaken by the manager of staff practice and the environment. Feedback was shared to support staff to continuously develop their practice. Staff benefited from regular wellbeing reviews with management, where they had the opportunity to discuss their wellbeing, any additional support required, achievements and training and development. Staff shared they appreciated their wellbeing reviews, and that the manager was always approachable.

Staff were passionate and enthusiastic about their ongoing professional development to improve their practice and outcomes for children. The team had taken part in a wide range of training, which included brain trauma and stress, supporting behaviours and emotions and under three's masterclass. Staff confidently evaluated and reflected on the impact of this training to develop their practice. This had a positive impact on enhancing outcomes for children.

## How good is our staff team?

**6 - Excellent**

We evaluated this key question as excellent, where performance was sector leading with outstandingly high outcomes for children.

### Quality Indicator 4.3 - Staff deployment

Familiar and consistent staff cared for and supported children throughout their day, which provided consistency for children and families. This ensured positive attachments could be developed and maintained. Staff were readily available to speak to families at any time, to share information and provide support. Parents shared that they are happy with the communication between them and staff/keyworkers.

The service was well staffed, which ensured staff ratios were maintained consistently. Busier times of the day were well managed and appropriately staffed to ensure children continued to receive high quality care. The manager was also regularly on the floor to support staff to care for children and provide consistent care. This maintained ratios and provided consistency for children and families. Staff breaks did not impact on the children's safety, play or learning and ratios were maintained.

Staff were passionate and motivated to attend training to support their professional development. The team were highly skilled and utilised this skill set effectively to support individual needs across the service. Individual professional learning journals showed reflective accounts and the impact on professional learning and development. Management continually reviewed these, regularly adding comments of praise and further suggestions to support staff knowledge and skills. This was evident within staff practice and staff shared which training had influenced aspects of the care and support they provided.

Children were involved in the recruitment process for new staff. Staff stay for a stay and play, and children could voice their feedback to staff, supporting them to feel valued. New members of staff completed a robust induction considering the national induction resource. They were allocated a mentor and spoke about the solid foundations this provided to support them in their role. Staff had opportunities to shadow



other staff and shared that they found management to be very supportive within their induction process.

Effective communications were consistently maintained with families within the service. One parent shared, "the communication is absolutely brilliant. There is an email sent out regularly updating the parents on what's new at Poppies, if there's any new staff, what's been happening etc. The app seesaw is great, full of information for e.g., what was for lunch and a brief description on what they have been up to that day. You are also always welcome to ask any questions when you collect your child at the end of the day". This approach promoted consistency and continuity of care ensuring positive outcomes for children.

## Complaints

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

## Detailed evaluations

How good is our care, play and learning?	6 - Excellent
1.1 Nurturing care and support	6 - Excellent
1.3 Play and learning	6 - Excellent
How good is our setting?	6 - Excellent
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	6 - Excellent
How good is our leadership?	6 - Excellent
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	6 - Excellent
How good is our staff team?	6 - Excellent
4.3 Staff deployment	6 - Excellent

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