

Little Staggies ELC Day Care of Children

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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
30 January 2024

Service provided by:
Little Staggies ELC Ltd

Service provider number:
SP2019013402

Service no:
CS2019377651

About the service

Little Staggies ELC is situated on the outskirts of the town of Dingwall, in the Ross-Shire area of the Highlands.

The service was registered with the Care Inspectorate on 20 December 2019. The service is managed and provided by a private provider and is in partnership with the Highland Council to deliver funded early learning and childcare. It is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 48 children at one time. Of those no more than nine are ages under two years, no more than 15 are aged two to under three years and no more than 24 are aged three to those not yet of an age to attend primary school.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Monday 29 and Tuesday 30 January 2024. 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 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 12 children attending the service
- reviewed feedback from 13 parents and carers
- spoke with ten staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Children experienced nurturing care and support.
- Children benefited from leading their own play and learning.
- Planning processes required improvement.
- The use of open ended materials could be extended further across all playrooms to offer more creative learning and imaginative play experiences.
- The outdoor play area should be developed to offer children fun and exciting experiences to enhance play and learning opportunities.
- Quality assurance processes need to be embedded to secure sustained improvements across the service.

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?	3 - Adequate
How good is our setting?	3 - Adequate
How good is our leadership?	3 - Adequate
How good is our staff team?	3 - Adequate

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

How good is our care, play and learning?

3 - Adequate

We made an evaluation of adequate for this quality indicator, as several important strengths taken together just outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 1.1 : Nurturing care and support.

Most children were happy, active and having fun with their peers on the days of inspection. Natural friendships had formed between children in the nursery supported by staff. We observed children being caring and inclusive in their play with each other.

Staff chatted with parents when they dropped off and collected their children. This helped staff to build relationships and keep up to date with the children and their families' needs. However, some of the feedback we got from parents told us they would like more information about their child's day and their experiences while at nursery. Comments made included "sometimes communication could be better", "the recent departure of the room senior has resulted in less structured curriculum and a reduction in the quality of feedback and communication regarding my child", "information about my child's day upon pick up is variable".

The majority of staff interactions were kind, caring and nurturing. This contributed to children's overall wellbeing. Staff offered cuddles and reassurance when needed. However, not all staff knew the needs of all the children, which resulted in them not receiving the support they need to reach their potential. Some parents were of the opinion that most of the staff knew their children and were happy with the care provided for them. However, a number of parents were concerned about the high number of changes to staff, staff's lack of knowledge about their children and how this impacted on the quality of care children received, their wellbeing and safety. Comments made included "The staff turnover has been high recently", "multiple changes in staff and key workers has potentially affected the continuity of care and depth of knowledge about my child", "the current staff are all very good and well liked, however their lack of experience and knowledge is evident".

The staff team included staff with who did not yet have the experience and knowledge to consistently interact with children in a highly skilled manner. They did, however, show children respect and kindness. As a result, children felt valued and respected. We spoke with the manager regarding the importance of good role models and effective monitoring of practice to support newer staff to grow in confidence and skills

Staff knew the care and support needs, preferences and routines for the majority of the children attending. However, written personal planning information was inconsistent. Children's personal plans did not always reflect the child's needs and the strategies required to meet these needs, and not all forms were fully completed, signed or reviewed with parents. As a consequence, staff did not always have sufficient up to date information and understanding of the specific needs of the children attending to enable them to best support the children to progress and achieve their potential. The manager should now ensure that personal plans are regularly reviewed and updated with the most current targets, support strategies and next steps. (See area for improvement 1).

We saw that staff and children sat together during lunch. The children enjoyed their lunch and the opportunity to chat to each other. Staff praised and encouraged the children as they ate and were on hand to help them as needed. Lunch was a sociable event, where staff supported children to develop their language and communication skills.

Quality indicator 1.3 : Play and learning

Children were provided with play and learning opportunities that impacted positively on their development, health, wellbeing and happiness. For the majority of the time children benefitted from uninterrupted play, allowing them to become absorbed and have fun. This increased children's happiness and engagement.

We observed children having fun, both indoors and in the outdoor play area. We saw some children who were engaged in their play in a purposeful and meaningful way. We also saw some examples of staff effectively extending and building on children's play and learning. However, we identified missed opportunities when skilled and effective questioning could have further extended children's curiosity, problem-solving skills, and promote development of imagination.

On several occasions we observed children who were disengaged and not being sufficiently stimulated or challenged. Some areas of the nursery would benefit from additional quality resources to encourage imaginative play, spark curiosity and increase the opportunities for children to extend and consolidate their learning through play. Children would benefit from increased access to resources for sensory play. Language and numeracy opportunities could also be developed further across the nursery, including early mark making and writing skills. The manager and staff should review the current space and resources and develop play and learning opportunities available each day by focusing on children's interest, provocations, and experiences that spark children's curiosities. (See area for improvement 2).

We recognised some quality play, learning and development was taking place in each of the playrooms. However, there was scope to continue to develop the quality of written observations of children's experiences to ensure they were evaluative and focus on children's learning. Quality observations were not routinely being completed. Many contained only limited evaluation of children's progression and achievements. As a consequence, information was not effectively being used by staff to plan appropriately to meet children's individual needs, show progression in learning and identify next steps. The manager and senior staff had already identified this as an area for improvement. They should continue to support all staff to develop their skills and understanding in relation to monitoring and tracking children's learning and progress. This would add value to the children's experience and ensure they are fully supported and challenged.

Areas for improvement

1. To meet children's health, welfare and safety needs, the manager should continue to review and develop children's personal plans and identify appropriate strategies to meet children's needs, support progress and help children to achieve their full potential. These plans should be reviewed at least every six months.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'My personal plan (sometimes referred to as a care plan) is right for me because it sets out how my needs will be met, as well as my wishes and choices' (HSCS 1.1)

2.

To promote their individual learning and development, the manager and staff should provide children with a choice from a rich variety of experiences. They should create an environment which inspires children's imagination and provides children with more challenging opportunities to discover, explore, experiment and problem solve.

Consideration should be given to:

- supporting children to lead their own learning by ensuring they have the resources to do this
- developing opportunities which stimulate creativity and curiosity in the play environment
- re-establish effective planning cycles to ensure all children are receiving a wide range of play and learning experiences.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which states that: 'As a child, I can direct my own play and activities in the way that I choose, and freely access a wide range of experiences and resources suitable for my age and stage, which stimulate my natural curiosity, learning and creativity' (HSCS 2.27).

How good is our setting?

3 - Adequate

We made an evaluation of adequate for this quality indicator, as several important strengths taken together just outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 2.2 : Children experience high quality facilities.

Children experienced a welcoming and homely nursery with plenty of natural light and good ventilation. Some areas within the playrooms would benefit from some attention, including the soft furnishings in the book corner and cosy areas. Children had space to freely move around indoors and outdoors.

Ensuring a healthy and safe environment for the children was a priority for the manager and the staff team. There were risk assessments of the building and outdoor area in place. There was a system to report any repairs and damaged items were promptly replaced. Infection prevention and control practices minimised the potential spread of infection.

The building had a secure door entry system in place, with staff, and a camera security system, monitoring who entered and left the building. The outdoor play area was also secure. This meant the children were kept safe in the nursery and as they played outdoors.

The manager and staff recognised the value of introducing natural resources and loose parts. Some open ended real life and natural objects were being used in the playrooms to provide a stimulating space which offered challenge and promoted children's curiosity and imagination. These experiences developed children's skills in language, literacy and numeracy. A review of the layout of the playrooms and the resources available should be carried out to ensure that there is sufficient breadth and balance of resources including loose parts, natural and open-ended resources available within the indoor and outdoor spaces to enrich children's experiences. The playrooms should be inviting to children, provide opportunities to interact with print, text and numbers and ensure that they are challenged at the appropriate level for their stage of development and learning.

The outdoor area was looking very worn, with limited resources available to engage children. The development of the outdoor play area and the quality of the play experiences on offer had been identified by the service as a priority. Parents commented on the poor conditions outdoors and highlighted the need for the resources to be upgraded with greater choice for children.

How good is our leadership?

3 - Adequate

We made an evaluation of adequate for this quality indicator, as several important strengths taken together just outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 3.1 : Quality assurance and improvement are led well

Since the last inspection, there had been a significant number of changes within the staff team which had impacted on all areas of the service provided and outcomes for children. Due to these changes, there had been only limited progress in relation to embedding quality assurance processes. As the processes were still in their early stages, they were not yet resulting in positive improvements within the service or improved experiences or outcomes for children.

The quality assurance calendar was still in place and the manager stated that some core activities were continuing to be completed. For example, given the changes to the staff team, the manager was aware of the need to support staff and had continued to provide support and supervision sessions. However, there was little evidence of these having a positive impact on making improvements in the service and the quality of outcomes for children.

Robust and regular monitoring systems, including self-evaluation, need to be more firmly embedded with a focus on monitoring children's personal plans, children's experiences and monitoring of staff practice. This will ensure that improvements are sustained, and children continually benefit from a service that improves.

Effective systems were not in place to inform families about changes to the service and involve them in the development of the setting. The parental feedback we received as part of this inspection highlighted that parents felt that they had not been kept informed of changes to the service and that their feedback was not being sought. Parental comments included "Sometimes I feel communication could be better", "communication slow or lacking at times (eg staff member has left but no communication to parents about this)", "It would be good to have timely, written communication about important things, such as staff changes etc". Improvements were needed in relation to information sharing and how the service sought the views of parents, so that all stakeholders are enabled to positively influence the development of the service.

How good is our staff team?

3 - Adequate

We made an evaluation of adequate for this quality indicator, as several important strengths taken together just outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 4.3 : Staff Deployment

Since the last inspection there had been a significant number of changes to the staff team which had had an impact on staff deployment. This had led to children not always experiencing consistent care and the quality of play and learning the children experienced had also been affected.

The manager acknowledged that having a consistent and qualified staff team had been difficult to achieve and had had an impact on outcomes for children.

As part of the inspection process, parents were invited to provide feedback. Parents expressed their concerns in relation to staffing, the number of changes to the staff team and how this impacted on their children's experiences and continuity of care.

Although the current staff team had only been working together for a short time, we did observe some positive team working. They were warm and friendly, which promoted a happy and secure environment where children felt valued, loved and secure. Staff were welcoming and engaged in the inspection process. They were responsive to suggestions and showed a commitment to making improvements to support good outcomes for children.

Although the minimum adult to child ratio was met, the deployment and number of suitably qualified and competent staff working in the service was insufficient for ensuring high quality outcomes for children. The majority of staff recognised the importance of nurturing, warm, responsive attachment and interactions. However, due to competing demands placed on them they could not always offer the level of support and interaction they wanted to. As a result, the quality of children's experiences were compromised and their wishes and choices were not always respected. For example, play and learning experiences were not always being maximised to ensure children's individual development needs were supported. We saw missed opportunities for extending play and learning to support children to reach their potential.

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?	3 - Adequate
1.1 Nurturing care and support	3 - Adequate
1.3 Play and learning	3 - Adequate
How good is our setting?	3 - Adequate
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	3 - Adequate
How good is our leadership?	3 - Adequate
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	3 - Adequate
How good is our staff team?	3 - Adequate
4.3 Staff deployment	3 - Adequate

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