

Bonaly Forest Kindergarten Day Care of Children

Bonaly Scout Centre
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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
15 May 2024

Service provided by:
City of Edinburgh Council

Service provider number:
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Service no:
CS2023000102

About the service

Bonaly Forest Kindergarten is registered to provide a fully outdoor care service to a maximum of 35 children aged between three-years and primary school entry at any one time. Adult to child ratios will be a minimum of:

- three-years and over - one to eight if the children attend more than four hours per day, or one to 10 if the children attend for less than four hours per day.

The manager of the service is also the manager of Hawkhill Forest Kindergarten and Newbattle Forest Kindergarten.

The service was provided by City of Edinburgh Council and located in Bonaly Forest. There were two woodland bases, 'The Nest' and 'The Den.' The two sites were visible from each other but had their own space and facilities. Each base had a yurt offering shelter and a warm cosy space for children. There was running water on site accessed from the Baronial Hall, an old building close to one of the bases. This also provided a place for children to get warm in extreme weather. Staff could use the building for breaks, access to toilets and for charging devices. Children ate at benches that were under a tarpaulin shelter. A hot lunch was provided with a lunch assistant employed at each base to support the lunch experience. Snack foods were on offer across the day to ensure children had access to healthy food options when they were hungry. Children were provided with high-quality clothing and footwear to ensure they were safe and warm. Toilet tents were set up in each base but away from play areas to ensure children's privacy and dignity. Hand-washing was supported in a variety of ways to ensure children were able to wash their hands in warm water. Hand-washing facilities were situated next to the toilet tents, the food provision and at the access point of each base. Paper towels were available for drying hands. The site provided a variety of levels and surfaces allowing children to develop skills such as balancing as they explored and navigated their way around the natural environment.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 13 May 2024 between 08:00 and 16:00, and 15 May 2024 between 09:00 and 15:00. We provided feedback to the service on the second inspection day. The inspection was carried out by one inspector.

To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included the registration report, information submitted by the service, and intelligence gathered since registration. In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with several children using the service
- observed practice and daily life in the service including staff interactions with children
- spoke with staff
- spoke with family members
- received feedback from a Microsoft Forms survey sent to families
- reviewed documentation.

Key messages

- Nurturing and caring approaches from all staff created positive, trusting relationships with children and families.
- Sensitive and skilled interactions were used to expand children's play and learning. Staff were respectful in the way they spoke with children helping them to feel listened to, valued and loved.
- Staff supported children to develop independence, problem-solving skills and emotional resilience within the outdoor environment. This had a positive impact on children's overall development.
- Quality assurance and self-evaluation processes enabled the service to deliver high quality care.

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 felt loved, safe and respected. Most staff were highly skilled in delivering care and learning routines that were individual to children's needs. Effective communication with children and families ensured staff were aware of children's experiences from home. A child was asked if they wanted to share the news about their new baby sibling. Children experienced warm, kind, respectful and compassionate approaches to support their overall wellbeing. A parent said, "They greet you everyday at drop off and pick up, they often share stories about the day, they know my child well and that is reflected in how they speak about them. They truly care."

Children's physical and emotional health and wellbeing was supported very well in the outdoor Forest Kindergarten. Children were developing strategies that supported them to self-regulate. They enjoyed lying on the grass using their senses to focus on the natural world around them. Children told us they could hear the birds in the trees. We joined a group of children on an adventure climbing up to the top of the hill where they climbed the trees and swung from the branches. When asked about children's outdoor experiences families said:

"Rolling down hill, looking at the different animals and plants around them."

"The outdoor learning environment has been hugely beneficial to my child's growth and development."

"Always outdoors in all weather has made an extremely hardy child."

"Running in the field climbing hills."

Children's overall wellbeing was supported through effective personal planning. Each child's personal plan was created in collaboration with families. Staff valued and listened to families ensuring a consistent approach to planning support for children. This promoted continuity of care for all children. Staff knew children very well and were responsive to their changing needs. Agreed strategies and individual support plans recognised when children's social and emotional development needed some additional support. For instance, during transitions from one setting to another or when changes within the family had an emotional impact on a child. Staff ensured that children received the right care at the right times. A parent said, "I am fully involved in my child's care, including developing and reviewing their personal plan."

Mealtimes were managed well to meet the needs of children. A hot lunch, including soup and a main meal, was provided each day. A lunch assistant employed at each base supported the lunch experience. Children sat at benches that were under a tarpaulin shelter. Staff supported an unhurried, safe and sociable experience. Some children chose to have lunch in the yurt. This created a calm experience for those children that needed a quieter space to eat. It was recognised that children burned energy when spending their day outdoors and needed additional calories to stay healthy. Snack foods were on offer across the day to ensure children had access to healthy food options when they were hungry. Children developed life skills and independence when preparing food, washing dishes and recycling food waste.

They made nettle burgers that were cooked on the fire pit. They said the burgers were 'yummy!' A parent said, "The range of snacks is healthy with plenty of fruit. The children have the opportunity to cook and help prepare the food. Great use is made of the outdoor setting and camp fire." The service aimed to extend the planting and growing of fruit and vegetables across the site. This will develop children's interest in where their food comes from.

Quality indicator 1.3: Play and Learning

Children were empowered to lead their own play and learning in a rich outdoor environment. Play opportunities that supported big movement and learning, and interacting with the world around them ignited children's creativity, curiosity and imagination, whilst fostering a sense of wellbeing and calm. Staff understood the importance of play and the need for children to learn through play at their own pace and in their own way. Children were developing life skills including problem solving, critical thinking, communication and collaboration. Staff understood how children learn and develop outdoors and ensured that they provided experiences, interactions and the spaces to influence children's progress and development. Children were being supported to achieve their potential.

Children were experts in leading their own play and learning. They were developing positive, respectful relationships when collaborating with their friends as they dug a hole looking for treasure and used ropes tying them around a tree stump. We went on an adventure with a group of children up a hill to a forest area. The children told us they were monkeys climbing in the trees. Children had a clear understanding of how they kept themselves safe. When asked how they stayed safe, a child said, "I check the branch isn't wobbly so it's a safe branch." Staff asked children questions that helped them broaden their knowledge and understanding. This enhanced children's experiences and challenged their thinking. Children were becoming confident in their own ability and were having fun as they engaged in interesting high quality play and learning experiences.

Planning approaches ensured staff responded to the needs of children alongside implementing intentional experiences. This helped children develop their skills, knowledge and understanding of the world around them. Detailed tracking, monitoring and quality observations helped staff to recognise what children liked to do and what might interest them next. They reflected on what children needed and what they needed to provide in the learning environment. For instance, some children needed appropriate challenge so were encouraged to take part in 'adventures' that helped them connect new discoveries to what they already knew. Staff worked with children to take their learning further.

Numeracy and literacy were naturally incorporated across the environment. There were safe spaces for children to read, talk, sing and rhyme. Staff role modelled language and helped children to build their vocabulary helping to make sense of the world. Fine motor skills were developed as children made paper aeroplanes after seeing and hearing an aeroplane fly overhead. Children talked about pattern and shape as they studied leaves and bugs, and problem solved as they measured, sorted and explored cause and effect through their play.

Staff had established strong relationships with families. Families told us that they received information about their child's experience at drop off and collection, that they had online updates and regularly had opportunities to spend time in the service hearing from staff about their children's progress and learning. Effective partnership working had supported children and families to develop an understanding of the benefits of the outdoor setting. Children had built resilience through being supported to navigate extreme weather and were learning to care for the environment. A parent said, "I appreciate Forest Kindergarten for the unique learning experiences it offers my child. Immersed in nature, she undergoes remarkable development, gaining invaluable resilience, particularly during the winter months."

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's experience of the outdoor environment enabled them to have regular contact with nature and to feel an appreciation and respect for biodiversity. They were becoming responsible citizens committed to sustainability. Children were flourishing when playing outdoors in all weathers. Experiencing a variety of weather conditions supported children to connect with the planet they live on. The environment offered different surfaces, different levels, lots of natural features to explore, trees to climb, and bushes and shrubs to hide and build dens in. Children benefitted from rich child-led play and learning as a result of their outdoor environment.

Children had opportunities to explore their environment and to enjoy time on their own if they chose. There were opportunities for children to benefit from risky play experiences helping them to build resilience, manage risk and to know their limits. Children told us that the ribbons around the trees showed when to stop. The identified boundaries across the forest environment kept children safe. When children needed to rest, relax and shelter from extreme weather, they could spend time in the yurt. A log burner in each yurt provided warmth in colder weather. Children could relax with a book or take part in a quieter activity. Providing spaces where children could relax and feel safe supported their overall wellbeing.

Infection control practices minimised the potential spread of infection, supporting a safe environment for children. Staff sensitively reminded and supported children to wash their hands at key times throughout the day. Access to warm running water, liquid soap and paper towels minimised children's risk to infection. Staff were trained in safe food handling outdoors. Regular cleaning routines and staff roles and responsibilities ensured the health and safety of 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 key question as very good.

Quality indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well

The management team promoted a shared vision for the service that reflected the views of children, families and staff. The vision and values underpinned the methodology and the understanding and beliefs of what was right for children in the outdoor setting. This created a happy and welcoming ethos which promoted a positive atmosphere for children to have fun, build relationships and learn about nature. A parent said, "The staff are all exceptional. The presence of senior staff such as Magda and Donna is wonderful. Teresa manages the team so well and has a beautiful relationship with all the children. The setting is wonderful and genuinely child-led."

Recognition by the management team of staff individual abilities, strengths and expertise contributed to high levels of satisfaction and professional growth. Staff were highly skilled, passionate and motivated and a shared value base meant that they worked well together. They provided appropriate support, at a suitably challenging pace for children, resulting in very good outcomes.

The management team was passionate about delivering quality experiences for children and families. Their strong leadership was supporting continuous improvement across the setting, securing positive experiences for children and families. Managers and staff were very reflective in their practice. They took opportunities to reflect in the moment, through professional dialogue and at team meetings. This enabled them to adapt and make changes where necessary. The improvement plan for the service included the views of staff, children and families. Effective policies, procedures and quality assurance processes supported the development of the service. The management team recognised the need to introduce data collection to provide evidence to show the long term impact of the Forest Kindergarten on 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 key question as very good.

Quality indicator 4.3: Staff deployment

Staff were committed and passionate about getting to know and understand children as individuals. Interactions were warm, kind and caring with children listened to most of the time. A rights based approach and being in nature empowered children building their confidence and self-esteem. Children were at the heart of the happy, nurturing and enabling outdoor environment.

The management team recognised and valued the importance of the service being appropriately staffed with the right skills mix across each base. Staff were able to spend time with children supporting their choices, interests and needs. Strong connections helped children to feel happy and to have fun. Staff were flexible and communicated with one another in a respectful and supportive way. They were empowered to deploy themselves and respond to the needs of the children across the setting. Children were safe and engaged in their play and learning, developing confidence and skills to be the best that they could be. A parent said, "Committed staff who clearly want the best for the children. The outdoor setting enables more individualised attention. The setting itself is beautiful and well equipped. The children are encouraged to take leadership roles and are proud of their Forest school."

Staff were recruited well to ensure they had the right skills, knowledge and understanding of how to deliver high quality outcomes for children in an outdoor setting. Induction and mandatory training supported reflection and evaluation of practice. There was a clear process for mentoring and supporting staff by using the skills and knowledge of the whole team. A well performing staff team ensured consistent approaches in the care and support for children and families.

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?	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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