

Midmill School Nursery Day Care of Children

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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
17 May 2024

Service provided by:
Aberdeenshire Council

Service provider number:
SP2003000029

Service no:
CS2016349501

About the service

Midmill School Nursery is provided by Aberdeenshire Council. The service operates from purpose built premises within one of the local primary schools in Kintore, close to local amenities like shops and parks.

The service is registered to provide care to a maximum of 70 children at any one time aged two, to those not yet attending primary school.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 16 May 2024 between the hours of 08:30 and 16:30 and 17 May 2024 between the hours of 09:00 and 11:30. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors 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 children during their play.
- Received seven parent/carer online questionnaires.
- Received five staff online questionnaires.
- Spoke with staff and management.
- Observed practice.
- Reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Staff were kind, caring and nurturing in their approach with children.
- Staff knew the children well and supported their individual needs.
- Staff were passionate about their role and were keen to extend their professional development to further improve outcomes for children.
- Management should now look at incorporating staff meetings, monitoring and leadership roles to ensure staff feel involved and valued.

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?	5 - Very Good
How good is our leadership?	4 - Good
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?

4 - Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore, we evaluated this quality indicator as very good.

Quality indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support

Staff were gentle, warm and caring in their approach. They were in tune with children and their needs, responding to children's requests and picking up on their cues. Comfort and reassurance were given when needed, contributing to positive attachments being formed. When speaking to staff it was clear that they knew the children very well, and were able to discuss personalities, sensitivities, likes, dislikes and any support needs. This allowed experiences, care and support to be tailored to children's individual needs which supported them to feel safe and secure.

Children's wellbeing and progress were well supported through effective personal planning. Each plan contained registration information and captured the children's likes, dislikes, routines, and interests. Personal planning documents were individualised for each child and the wellbeing indicators captured individualised information and supported the children's progression. This ensured a holistic approach to care and allowed staff to effectively track progress in health and wellbeing. Support plans were in place for children who required them. This contributed to staff being clear on sensitivities and how these were being supported, outlining any triggers and strategies being used. Parents told us that they were fully involved in their child's care, including developing and reviewing their personal plan. One parent said, "I feel the nursery is very open to sharing their care plan and how their days have been." Another said "Frequently asked to update plan and learning journal updated regularly. Discussions at every pickup if any concerns or points that can be supported"

Mealtimes were a relaxed, social experience for the children, allowing them to eat at a pace which suited them. There were opportunities for the children to be independent through preparing snack, serving food and drink, using cutlery, and scraping plates. This supported the development of important life skills. Staff sat with the children, chatting and supporting them. Food choices were nutritious and allowed children to try a variety of foods. Allergies and preferences were well considered and catered for which minimised the risk to children. Most parents told us that their child could choose from a healthy range of snacks and meals every day.

The setting's policy detailed how they would safely manage the administration of medication. This was stored appropriately in the original packaging, clearly labelled with the child's name. Medication forms contained accurate information providing clear details for staff to follow, including action to be taken in an emergency. Medication plans were regularly reviewed and audited, contributing to children being safe and well.

We saw that no children slept or required a nap as part of their daily routine at the time of our inspection. However, children's health and wellbeing was considered by the availability of quiet, homely, comfortable spaces for the children to rest and relax.

We did not see any nappy changing; however, an appropriate policy was in place. We asked staff to talk us through the procedure which appeared to be a relaxed, nurturing experience for the children with effective use of PPE (personal protective equipment) and appropriate changing facilities.

We evaluated this quality indicator as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 1.3: Play and learning

Children were happy and engaged in play throughout their day. A good range of age-appropriate resources, including loose parts and open-ended resources were on offer, in both indoor and outdoor environments. We saw children creating an electric car from wooden blocks and loose parts. They then used their car in their play to go on a journey and find porcupines. Children used small wooden blocks as phones to order their food from McDonalds. This promoted children's curiosity and encouraged them to be creative, problem solve together, and use their imagination.

We saw some staff extended children's learning using open questions. A child had created an obstacle course outdoors and was showing a staff member how to complete it. Questions like 'this is a really big step; how do I do this one?' encouraged the children to explain their thinking. This highlighted that staff were genuinely interested in children's perspectives and thoughts and took time to broaden children's thinking processes.

A child-led approach to learning had been implemented. Children were seen to be independent and could choose where and what they played with. We could see shelves and baskets housed a variety of resources to choose from. Children accessed these well and knew where to find resources to support their play and learning. Most parents told us their children's learning was supported through interesting and fun play experiences. One parent told us "My child is very active and creative; nursery gives him that outlet to satisfy this through things that aren't readily available at home. For example, block building, extensive arts and crafts, storytelling, puzzles, letter writing, and outdoor play with bikes, trikes and sledging." Another parent said "Outdoor, gardening, role play, activities for both gross and fine motor skills, playing games to enhance numbers, speech, problem solving and taking turns".

Language, literacy and numeracy experiences were good and woven throughout the provision. These included clocks, signs, measuring tapes and sticks and a range of mark making materials which we saw the children use well. We suggested that the setting consider adding more real resources such as scales, old phones and keyboards to enrich the resources on offer. Staff spontaneously read stories to children together in groups both inside and outdoors. We saw children use the signs to determine if the outdoor area was open. This supported the children's early language, literacy and numeracy development.

We saw that planning had been reinstated last year after being on hold for a period. Staff explained that planning had not been working as effectively recently. The team had identified this and were working hard to make changes. We could see that responsive and intentional planning had been considered. The setting were using the 'Learning journals' function to produce reports to identify gaps in children's learning. This supported staff to have a clearer understanding of the children's progress and put support in place if needed.

Learning journals were used to document observations and capture individual children's learning. These were well written and contained an overview of child development and observations under each of the curricular areas. While auditing observations, management should ensure consistency regarding the number of observations shared with parents and next steps being set for the children. This would support the development of planning of children's experiences, offer individualised support, and provide children with challenge and depth to learning. Some parents told us they would like more information about their

child's learning experiences. One parent said, "I wish communication about learning and activities was better (even weekly would be good, as staff are busy) as the parent zone app is used sporadically".

We found that children with additional support needs were in the most part well supported. Staff knew the children well and most used strategies detailed in support plans during interactions. Most of the time strategies used were effectively. We highlighted the benefits of regularly monitoring staff practice which would ensure there was a consistent approach to how all children were supported.

Children's opportunities were enhanced through links with the wider community. We saw the setting had recently reached out to local businesses to support with developing their outdoor area. A business had delivered bark to create areas for children to play. Children were involved in this process which supported them to make connections within their community. The setting participated in the Co-op food share scheme. The children understood how the scheme worked and we saw children selecting foods to take home and share with their families. This contributed to a sense of belonging within their community.

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

The environment was very well maintained and secure with plenty of natural light and ventilation. Resources, materials, greenery and lighting were added to soften the atmosphere within the rooms. These all helped create a welcoming feel to the service.

Children were observed to move around the available spaces with confidence, while being able to choose where they played. Children had the opportunity to play indoors or outside with staff supporting this well.

Indoor spaces were set up thoughtfully using furniture to create enclosures for the children to explore. A good variety of resources to support different play experiences were accessible to the children including messy play, construction, loose parts, house corner and quieter, cosier areas.

Outdoors was set up to ensure children were given daily opportunities for outdoor learning experiences in all weathers. There was a range of resources to support learning including open ended resources such as wooden planks, reels and crates, water play, mud kitchen, structures to climb and swing on and shelters for the children. We saw the children enjoyed being physically active and used the space well to run, climb, swing and balance on obstacle courses created. Children were confident and resilient during this type of play. Most parents told us their children had the opportunity to play outdoors and shared some of the experiences they were involved in. One parent said "bikes, trikes, sledging, climbing area in the nursery and in the school playground, mud area, planting fruit, vegetables and flowers, digging up areas." Another parent said "Gardening, gross and fine motor skills through balancing, mud kitchen, swing, water activities with the hoses. Learning to take turns with the swing and hammock." A third parent said "Having come from a setting with a forest school and who would do regular walks on nearby footpaths, this seems totally lacking here. Kids do go outside, and I know there are days they spend a lot of time outdoors, but what I've seen looks mostly like free play (which is great), but could maybe introduce more structured outdoor activities as well to expand using hand tools and make full use of the outdoor space and local woodland, footpaths." We saw that the environment, indoors and outside, was a focussed improvement area for the setting and they had already started developing this using community links.

Risk benefit assessments were in place for indoor and outdoor environments which raised staff awareness of potential risks, benefits and measures in place to support a safe environment. These were reviewed as changes occurred or as part of routine quality assurance. This ensured they were current and adapted as needed. We discussed involving staff and children more in assessing risk spontaneously, to support risky play and encourage children to think about their own safety. Accidents and incidents were documented well, and information shared with parents. These were then audited and action taken if necessary. This contributed to the safety and wellbeing of staff and children.

The implementation of effective infection control measures ensured a clean, safe environment for children. We observed hand washing being carried out by both staff and children at appropriate times. PPE was worn when required in line with best practice guidance, for example during food preparation. This helped to keep children safe and well.

The local authority was responsible for the upkeep of the building and carrying out repair work. Any work or repairs carried out by the janitor was noted in the maintenance log which was kept on the premises. Children's personal information was stored securely in the setting. This was easily accessible for staff.

How good is our leadership?

4 - Good

We evaluated this key question as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well

The nursery had a vision, values and aims in place which reflected the practice within the setting. We discussed the importance of developing this further to include the views and ideas of current staff, children and parents. This would promote a shared vision and values for the service, capturing what was important to all using the service and working there. Leaders should create an environment where everyone feels confident to initiate change and share in the process.

Children and families' views were valued which supported the service's ongoing improvements. They were consulted through formal approaches such as questionnaires requesting feedback about mealtimes, the environment and learning journals and through informal approaches such as the floor books in the setting. The nursery used 'you said, we did' approach and fed back the outcome to parents within newsletters about how their views had influenced change in the setting. This ensured families were valued partners in ongoing improvements within the nursery. Most parents felt they were involved in a meaningful way to help develop the service.

Through discussions with staff, it was clear most felt they could be better supported within their role. Management within the nursery should consider ways to support staff to feel more valued. We discussed staff taking on leadership roles, prioritising staff meetings to ensure there is time to reflect together and ensuring regular support and supervision meetings take place. This would support staff to have confidence in their capacity to support children and families to achieve their full potential and increase staff morale within the setting. **(See area for improvement 4.3)**

The setting had documented their improvement journey using floor books. Engaging with recognised audit tools, such as the quality framework, had allowed them to recognise what they were doing well and identify areas for improvement. An improvement plan was used to support improvement and document developments. The setting should now use their success criteria to evaluate their improvements and consider whether there is a need for further development or if the outcome had influenced further improvements. Reflecting on this as team would support staff to be clear on the setting's focus for improvement.

The setting was using a quality assurance calendar to effectively support the procedures and audits within the nursery. These were evaluated and shared with staff to ensure everyone was clear and knew the outcome and the impact of these. For example, audits of accidents and incidents shared with staff, ensured they were aware of any trends or patterns highlighted enabling them to put supports and procedures in place. This supported the safety and wellbeing of children. Leadership should now look at incorporating staff meetings and monitoring to ensure staff feel involved and supported in their roles. **(See area for improvement 4.3)**

How good is our staff team?

3 - Adequate

We evaluated this quality indicator as adequate, where strengths only just outweighed weaknesses.

Quality indicator 4.3: Staff deployment

Staff were warm and responsive in their approach. They joined in children's play and followed their interests. Staff knew the individual needs and interests of the children which allowed them to offer individualised support and care. Children appeared confident, happy and engaged in their play supported by staff who were observed to be taking a genuine interest in the children, having fun and chatting to them about what they were doing. Most parents told us they had a strong connection with staff. One parent said "Staff are very engaging during welcome and handover. There is open dialogue about challenges and feedback on positives". Another parent said "Pretty much all the permanent staff are very informative about my child who I have complete trust in. I seek out the staff who will have thoughts and engage on any matters I may bring up". Following discussions with staff, we asked that the leadership team consider the value of key workers becoming more involved in meeting with parents to access information first hand have discussions around children's learning and progress.

Staff communicated well, were flexible and moved with children depending on their interests and needs. They asked each other for support and offered support to colleagues. Staffing levels throughout both days were supported by staff from the cluster and supply staff due to illness, this helped ensure the wellbeing and safety of children using the service. Children were well supervised most of the time however, whilst outdoors staff were task orientated at times. We highlighted the importance of supervising snack outdoors to ensure children were safe and well. Although staff worked together, they told us they would like to see an improved ethos. This would mean staff would enjoy being in the setting more and feel involved as part of an effective team. **(Area for improvement 1 reinstated)**

Staff were appropriately qualified, some working towards gaining further qualifications and had a good knowledge of child development. They were able to discuss how they had identified areas for development and were supporting children with their social skills, confidence, and speech. One parent told us "Majority of the staff show a high level of care and professionalism, so I feel like they really care about my child's individual needs, they are also open to suggestions and actually implement them". Another parent said

"Speech has improved. Asks to go every day even at weekend. Also, a good outlet for his socialising and energy that's fun and supportive that encourages learning and development".

Staff undertook regular training and were enthusiastic about continuing with their professional development. They were reflecting on their practice and were able to discuss the impact training had on outcomes for children. Through discussions with staff, we were able to see approaches shared at training being used effectively in the setting to support children with their feelings and emotions.

The setting had an induction policy and a relief staff checklist in place to support new and relief staff. We discussed incorporating the 'Early Learning and Childcare National Induction Resource' into the induction process and encourage questions and reflection. This would support new staff to have a better understanding of their roles, responsibilities, and effective ways of working.

Areas for improvement

1. 1. To improve outcomes for children and maintain staff wellbeing, the provider should implement a robust system to support effective staff deployment. This should include but is not limited to:

- a) Ensuring that children are effectively supported and supervised in order to keep them safe, including snacks and mealtimes.
- b) Providing designated time for staff members to attend regular team meetings and support and supervision with the management team.
- c) Supporting staff to take leadership roles and be fully involved in the developments of the service.
- d) Monitoring staff practice to ensure consistent approaches and support staff in their roles.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I use a service and organisation that are well led and managed' (HSCS 4.23).

What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection

Areas for improvement

Previous area for improvement 1

1. To improve outcomes for children and maintain staff wellbeing, the provider should implement a robust system to support effective staff deployment. This should include but is not limited to:

- a) Ensuring that children are effectively supported and supervised in order to keep them safe.
- b) Providing designated time for staff members to record children's observations, take part in training and attend regular team meetings.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I use a service and organisation that are well led and managed' (HSCS 4.23).

This area for improvement was made on 31 August 2023.

Action taken since then

Staff deployment ensured that children were effectively supported and were kept safe most of time, we highlighted the importance of supervising snack outdoors. In order to support staff wellbeing the setting should consider ways to improve the ethos, ensuring staff would feel valued and involved as an effective team. **This area for improvement was not met.**

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	5 - Very Good
1.3 Play and learning	4 - Good
How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	5 - Very 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?	3 - Adequate
4.3 Staff deployment	3 - Adequate

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