

Family Centre - Merkinch Day Care of Children

Family Centere - Inverness
Telford Road
Inverness
IV3 8HY

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
23 April 2024

Service provided by:
Highland Council

Service provider number:
SP2003001693

Service no:
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About the service

Family Centre - Merkinch is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 60 children between the ages of two years to not yet attending primary school.

The nursery is an integral part of the Family Centre. It consists of two large playrooms, toilet and nappy changing facilities, cloakroom/reception area, dining area, kitchen and offices. They can also make use of other meeting/group rooms within the centre when required. There is a fully enclosed outdoor learning environment for children to access.

As well as the nursery, Family Centre - Merkinch provides family support work to children and families in the community through 1 to 1 work, family sessions and group work. The centre also has close links with other agencies supporting and working with families.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Monday 22nd and Tuesday 23rd April 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 children using the service.
- Spoke with families using the service.
- Reviewed feedback provided by parents and carers.
- Spoke with staff and management.
- Observed practice and daily life.
- Reviewed documents.

Key messages

Children received extremely high levels of nurturing care and support from a passionate and dedicated staff team who created an inclusive, nurturing and loving ethos.

Exceptionally strong working partnerships with parents had been established, which contributed to supporting the holistic needs of each child and their family to improve their wellbeing.

Families were made to feel extremely welcome in the service.

Highly skilled staff empowered and enabled children to reach their full potential.

Play spaces were carefully created and a variety of rich resources across the whole service promoted children's natural curiosity and imagination, learning and growth.

Highly effective self-evaluation and reflection on practice enabled the senior leadership team and staff to clearly identify what was working well and what could be developed further.

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?	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?

5 - Very Good

We evaluated different quality indicators within this quality theme as excellent and very good, with an overall evaluation of very good. We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children

Quality indicator 1.1 : Nurturing care and support

Children and their families were at the heart of the the service. Staff had established strong and trusting relationships with the children and their families which resulted in children feeling safe, secure and loved. Children received exceptionally high levels of care and support from dedicated and skilled staff. This was confirmed by families who spoke extremely highly of all the staff and how much they appreciated all that they did. Comments made included: 'The support is always there for the children and the parents. It's a great team of people', 'thank you to every member of staff', 'is the most kind, loving person. She puts in 100% effort all the time and my son loves her' and 'they are all amazing in their own way'.

Everyone in the service had high aspirations for the children attending. Staff were extremely responsive and skilled at picking up on children's verbal and non verbal cues and being able to effectively support them through well-timed and thoughtful interactions. This contributed to the children's sense of security and promoted their overall wellbeing. We observed staff who skilfully provided reassurance, praised children and offered cuddles and support when needed.

Children's wellbeing was supported by staff who knew them extremely well. Having strong relationships with families, and working in partnership with them, allowed staff to sensitively gather important information to meet the needs of individual children. This supported highly effective personal planning processes. Staff could confidently discuss children and their individual needs and the strategies to support them.

Mealtimes provided children with opportunities to develop their independence, social and life skills. Children experienced snack and lunchtime experiences which were relaxed, sociable and unhurried. Meals and snacks were healthy, nutritious and dietary requirements were well supported and respected. Children were supported to develop important independence skills when pouring drinks and self-serving food. Children were very well supported to eat well and were readily offered more food if requested. Staff sat with children, chatting and modelling healthy eating, creating opportunities for children to develop their emerging language and social skills.

Where children required further support, staff had established extremely strong working relationships with other agencies and were confident in their role in liaising and working with them. They worked very closely with other professionals to ensure consistency in their approach. As a result, children experienced a collaborative approach to their care and development.

A core strength of the nursery was the high level of support provided to families. As part of the Family Centre, the nursery staff worked very closely with their colleagues who worked directly with families in the community. There was also a wide range of meaningful support, resources and services available to families including emotional and practical help for families in crisis. Within the building families could access various support groups and activities run by either centre staff or visiting professionals, for example Book Bug, baby massage and PEEP sessions.

This contributed to supporting the holistic needs of each child and their family to improve their wellbeing. Families considered the support offered to them as being invaluable. One parent commented: 'The staff are incredible. You can tell how much they care about each and every child. Great support for the grown ups too'. The diverse range of support available ensured that children and their families were included, valued and respected.

Children were protected from harm by a highly knowledgeable and competent staff team. Staff made sure that children's safety and wellbeing was a priority as they fully recognised the importance of identifying protection concerns early and ensuring the correct support was put in place.

Quality indicator 1.3 : Play and Learning

Children were very happy and engaged in their play and actively led their play and learning throughout the day. They confidently moved around the setting with a real sense of freedom and fun. Being outdoors was particularly popular with all the children. Staff were passionate and committed to the benefits learning outdoors had on a child's development and wellbeing. Children were able to access the outdoor play area on a daily basis for fresh air, exercise and active play. We saw the staff supporting children with risky play, for example, using large loose parts, climbing up equipment unaided and playing on wheeled toys. Children took great pride in their achievements.

Children benefited from a high quality play and learning environment, both indoors and outdoors. A balance of spontaneous and planned quality experiences promoted children's choice and independence. Play spaces were well resourced and promoted learning through real life experiences. There was a good mix of natural and planned experiences. Children were offered rich, stimulating and interesting experiences which inspired them to be curious and encouraged them to be creative, problem solve and use their imagination. Play and learning opportunities impacted positively on children's development, health, wellbeing and happiness. For extended periods of time, children benefitted from uninterrupted play, allowing them to become absorbed in their play and have fun. This increased children's happiness and engagement.

We saw high quality play, learning and development was taking place throughout the inspection. Language, literacy and numeracy were naturally incorporated into most play areas within the nursery. Staff frequently sang and read to children, fostering their language development. Children had the opportunity to develop their numeracy, language and literacy skills while taking part in different activities, playing with real life resources in the home corner, playing in the construction area, water play, messy play or investigating outdoors.

Developing children's literacy skills both while at the nursery and at home was a key priority and a strength. As well as providing all children with their own story sack, the service had created a community library which families could access. There was a full range of children's books, in English and other languages spoken by the families attending. Feedback from families highlighted how much they appreciated the library and the opportunity to read books with their children at home.

Planning approaches were responsive and followed children's interests, wishes and needs. Staff empowered children to be successful and lead their own play and learning. Staff were adding further value to children's play and learning through their carefully considered interactions. Staff were skilful in their interactions and naturally engaged effectively with children, showed interest and supported their interests and curiosities which extended their learning. Questioning by staff encouraged children to think independently and to reflect, as a result children were respected, valued and achieving.

Families felt included and meaningfully engaged in their child's play, learning and development. Staff ensured that parents were well informed of children's learning, progression and next steps and were encouraged to give their feedback. Families were welcome to look at their child's 'learning adventures' folder any time. Families very much appreciated the quality of information about their child's progression and achievements they received on a daily basis. One parent commented: 'They always capture moments with my little one. Always taking pictures and updating her folder'.

How good is our setting?

5 - Very Good

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

Quality Indicator 2.2 Children experience high quality facilities

The playrooms were well furnished, organised and spacious. They were clean, bright, welcoming and well ventilated. Ensuring a healthy and safe environment for the children was a priority for the manager and the staff. 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. There were appropriate risk assessments in place which promoted the safety of the children as well as daily checks of the premises. Parents all provided very positive feedback about the premises and the range of resources and activities available. Many highlighted how much they appreciated the children getting lots of time outdoors to play, explore and learn.

Children benefitted from a high-quality learning environment. Staff had created well thought out, inviting, fun and stimulating play spaces. They were homely, comfortable and furnished to a high standard. The layout of the playrooms and the storage of resources supported quality play and learning experiences. Children were able to independently select resources of their choice and lead their own play. We saw children who were busy and motivated as they comfortably moved around the room and were engaged in their play.

Consideration had been given to the variety of activities and experiences on offer to reflect children's interests, stimulate curiosity and imagination, offer challenge and extend their play. Throughout the setting, both indoors and outdoors, very good use was made of natural materials, open ended resources and loose parts. We saw a variety of resources such as sand, musical instruments, paint and water. These provided children with opportunities to take part in sensory play and develop their creative skills. We observed children following their own interests within the play spaces and staff supporting this very well.

Children had opportunities to rest and relax. Staff had developed quiet areas in each of the playrooms to support children's emotional security and wellbeing. Good use had been made of lighting and soft furnishings to create cosy areas. Children benefitted from these spaces, and they were regularly used.

Children benefitted from opportunities to develop their awareness of risk in their play. The children were also actively involved in risk assessing the outdoor play area before they all went out. Being responsible for going to check the garden with a member of staff was a role the children took very seriously.

Each of the playrooms had access to the large and varied outdoor play area. Children could move equipment between the indoors and outdoors, which ensured their play and learning was not interrupted.

The outdoor area was an interesting and exciting space for the children and offered a range of play opportunities to extend learning and follow interests. It provided a natural environment where children could climb, explore, dig, practice their balance skills and develop their gross motor skills. Children had access to a breadth of rich and meaningful learning opportunities, including a mud kitchen, tyres, plastic pipes, wheeled toys, water play and a planting area.

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

Children benefitted from a very positive ethos and a culture of continuous improvement. The manager promoted a positive attitude to change and recognised the importance of including all relevant stakeholders in developing a shared vision, value and aims. The manager and staff were all very passionate and committed to the continuous improvement of the service and strived to achieve the best possible outcomes they could for children and their families. High quality practice and improving outcomes for children was at the forefront of the centre's improvement plan. One parent commented: 'I think the staff and the management are always looking to advance themselves constantly so they can support the children and their families and look to the future'.

The service recognised the importance of involving children and families in the evaluation process. Children were consulted and their views, thoughts and ideas were valued and responded to. Children's views informed ongoing improvements and shaped their nursery experiences. This resulted in children feeling valued and included in the improvement journey.

Establishing and maintaining strong working relationships with families was a priority for the management and all the staff. This helped parents to feel valued and included, and promoted a shared partnership in the delivery of high quality care for children. Regular communication with families took place through a variety of methods and they were also very welcome to spend time in the nursery. As part of the family centre, families also had access to a range of other services. Families told us that they felt extremely welcome in the nursery. They described all the staff as being 'incredible', 'always make time to chat about any concerns' and 'amazing staff - so understanding, respectful, great for support'.

Staff were meaningfully and actively involved in the evaluation process. There were regular team meetings where all staff were supported to reflect on the service provided, evaluate learning opportunities and resources available. They could also share any feedback or suggestions they might have with management while they were in the playrooms on a daily basis. All staff told us they felt supported and valued and respected as a skilled team. They confidently spoke about how they had been actively involved in self evaluation, the identification of priorities, introducing improvements and how these had positively impacted on the care, play and learning of the children.

Robust formal and informal quality assurance processes allowed focussed and meaningful opportunities for the management team and staff to review and monitor various aspects of the service. This resulted in areas for improvement being identified promptly, shared with staff and actions taken to make positive changes to children's experiences. An example of this was extending the use of Makaton across the setting. All staff attended training and Makaton was now embedded in daily life within the nursery.

Families had also been included. Staff created short video clips to support families to learn some Makaton after they reported how their children had used Makaton at home.

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.

The best use was being made of the wide range of staff expertise, skills and experience. This meant that children were benefiting from an extremely passionate and skilled staff team. Staff knew what to do and where they needed to be to ensure children could play and learn and experience nurturing care and support at all times.

There was a strong positive ethos within the service. Staff were extremely skilled, dedicated and nurturing, and committed to providing a positive experience for the children in their care. They demonstrated positive team working, which promoted a happy, welcoming and inclusive environment. They were responsive and respectful of children during interactions and play, which supported children to feel safe and secure.

Effective arrangements were in place to promote continuity of care across the day. There were high staffing ratios across the setting throughout the day which allowed for effective supervision and quality engagement. Staff were flexible in their deployment, which supported children to lead their play and engage in free flow opportunities whilst remaining safe.

There was excellent communication between staff throughout the day and staff were extremely flexible and supportive of each other when routine tasks were being completed. This meant that children received very high levels of care and support at all times. For example, at lunchtime the staff worked seamlessly together to provide children with a relaxed and social experience where they received all the support and encouraged they needed.

Communication with all children was a priority for the management and staff. All children were heard and actively listened to as staff confidently used a range of communication systems including visual symbols, timetables and Makaton. Every member of staff had completed Makaton training and were naturally using it throughout the day. Families were also being supported to learn.

Staff cared deeply about the children and their families and as a result they had developed close and positive relationships with them. Families told us they felt valued and highly supported. Parents commented: 'The Family Centre has been by my side, supporting and advising me', 'the service is perfect', 'I personally feel we all have a voice and are well listened to', 'every member of the team are wonderful, caring, supportive and understanding'. This highlighted excellent partnership working and ensured all children and families were effectively supported to achieve 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?	5 - Very Good
1.1 Nurturing care and support	6 - Excellent
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?	6 - Excellent
4.3 Staff deployment	6 - Excellent

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