

Curious Minds Education Centre Day Care of Children

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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
15 May 2024

Service provided by:
Curious Minds Education Centre Ltd

Service provider number:
SP2015012545

Service no:
CS2015339577

About the service

Curious Minds Education Centre is a day care of children service situated in the town centre of Elgin. The service is registered to provide a care service for a maximum of 50 children aged two years to not yet attending primary school, of whom no more than 10 are aged under 3 years.

The service is situated in the town centre area near shops, a library, a community garden, a park, wooded areas and other amenities. The children are cared for in a one storey building and have access to one small and one large playroom, and two separate but interconnecting small outdoor play areas.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 14 May 24, between 08:45 and 17:30, and 15 May 2024, between 8.15am and 13:00. 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, 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
- Contacted 13 parents/carers
- Spoke with staff and management
- Observed practice and daily experiences
- Reviewed documents.

Key messages

Children were helped to form positive relationships, as staff provided warm and caring approaches that supported their overall wellbeing.

Children were having fun, they were able to lead and make choices about their play both indoors and outdoors.

Play and learning experiences were enhanced through connections with the wider community.

Children benefited from being cared for in a well furnished, comfortable and clean setting.

The vision for the setting had been reviewed with children, families and staff. It helped everyone to know what was important to the setting, to meet the needs of children and families.

The service improvement plan (SIP) was being used consistently to inform improvement in the quality of service to 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?	4 - Good
How good is our setting?	4 - Good
How good is our leadership?	4 - Good
How good is our staff team?	4 - Good

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

1.1 Nurturing care and support

Children were helped to form positive relationships as staff provided warm and caring approaches, that supported their overall wellbeing. Where children needed support with personal care it promoted children's dignity and privacy and staff interactions nurtured children's confidence. When children were tired and sought comfort, staff responded with cuddles and their emotional security was supported through suitable arrangements for sleep. Quiet/cosy areas were available in both of the playrooms.

Families had been involved in the creation of the child's personal plan, such as health, interests and likes/dislikes, to help identify individual needs and to support overall wellbeing and promote consistency of care. Chronologies also helped to identify children's needs and directed actions to support them well. Parents had been involved in the review of the personal plan, although the format meant that dates and parents signature were not always evident. We also considered that involving key-workers consistently in the review process, would enhance the positive relationships with parents. The management team planned to update the personal plan template to include the wellbeing indicators SHANARRI (represents a basic requirement of what children need to grow and develop - Getting It Right For Every Child). This would help to raise their importance and embed them within the personal planning approach. Parents strongly agreed and agreed they were fully involved in their child's care, including developing and reviewing their personal plan.

Children were involved in the preparation of the snack, this included cutting up and peeling fruit. Children collected their own utensils and foods at snack and meal times and poured their own drinks. Serving dishes with extra foods were placed on the table so that children could help themselves. Children enjoyed sitting together in small groups and chatting with each other, that supported a pleasant social experience. Staff sat with them so that they were focused on, and able to respond to the needs of the children. Meals and snacks were unhurried and there was a relaxed atmosphere. Pre-school children had their lunch provided in two sittings. A small group of children sat in the playroom next to the dining room whilst the the other group continued playing. At times, noise levels were heightened and it was not such a calm experience for those children having lunch. We shared this with leaders, so that, consideration was given to children always enjoying a relaxed relaxed atmosphere when eating.

Food choices reflected current guidance and were appropriate for children's dietary needs and/or food preferences. Fresh water was available to children in the large play room children were able to help themselves. Younger children had their own water bottles both arrangements enabled children to remain hydrated throughout the day.

1.3 Play and Learning

Children were having fun, they were able to lead and make choices about their play. They clearly valued being able to decide whether to play indoors or outdoors and were meaningfully involved in initiating their own play and learning. The calm atmosphere also helped children to be motivated in their play.

Resources and materials were readily accessible and visible in both play rooms. Children explored water play with a variety of containers and pipettes both inside and outside. In the role play kitchen/home corner, they chopped vegetables, fed and bathed the babies and did washing. Children also used their imagination in the construction area that was equipped with large blocks, they created different structures, walkways, boats and castles. A child told us how they were going to the island in their boat, they were using a small wheel for steering and pointed to a video of a ship sailing. They advised us to stay on the boat as the water was rough and we may drown. Toddlers enjoyed schematic play there they repeated actions, carried things around and were able to turn themselves and things upside down. It helped their brain development and to find out how things worked. A child was enjoying the trapeze bar swinging around and another was enjoying a small obstacle course, another child was loving the sound of the pushing the toy lorry up and down the decked ramp.

Continuing to offer versatility of resources to the children would help to ensure that they were led to find ways to see how things worked and to explore their emerging interests. Literacy and numeracy resources were not confined to specific learning areas to encourage rich play across children's experiences. Children used tape measures in the construction area, they counted pieces of fruit for snack and were encouraged to make a nominal payment of real coins. When building children sourced different sizes of blocks and poles. Staff listened and talked with children during activities, modelling language and engaging them in stories.

There was a balance of spontaneous and planned quality experiences that followed children's interests. A child had expressed an interest in weddings, it sparked learning conversations that resulted in a role play wedding that involved the children. Play and learning was enhanced through connections with the wider community. A group of children walked to the community garden where they were growing vegetables and weeding, they wore gloves and used real tools. A group went to see if there were any tadpoles in the stream and came back wearing frog headbands they had made.

Responsive and intentional planning whilst at an early stage of development was being progressed. The service had been receptive of the support from the local authority early years' teacher, who had supported staff to develop their skills in recognising 'teachable moments' to help increase responsive interventions that supported children's interests and learning. The format for children's learning folders identified progress and assessment of next steps. Discussions and sharing of practice for all staff was enabling a consistent approach to be established. The management team identified that monitoring and discussion with staff would continue and opportunities for children to be meaningfully involved in their learning, would be developed as part of the process. Parents told us that they were always welcomed into the service and had the opportunity to discuss their child's care, play and learning.

Children with additional needs were well supported and had appropriate plans in place. Families were involved and able to share in planning for their child's learning and progress.

Staff supported the emotional resilience of the children through nurturing and approaches that secured their wellbeing. Staff were engaged with the children and their interactions helped to widen children's thinking. To help ensure that a consistent approach was maintained, we advised leaders to embed the programme of observing and monitoring staff practice that also helped to identify any training needs.

How good is our setting?

4 - Good

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

Children benefited from being cared for in a comfortable setting. Neutral décor and full length windows provided plenty of natural light and ventilation that helped to promote children's psychological wellbeing. Children had ample space for their needs.

The setting was clean and generally well maintained. Staff were clear about the procedures for cleaning within the service. Nappy changing facilities had been changed and followed best practice guidance, so that they supported the safety wellbeing needs of children and staff.

Staff and children followed good hand hygiene practices, children were encouraged to wash their hand well and supervised by staff as needed. Staff used personal protective equipment (PPE) during personal care, that helped to reduce the potential for infection. Soft furnishings and bedding were changed/cleaned and followed best practice. Staff had completed food hygiene training to support food safety.

Overall, staff worked well together to remove risks to the children within the setting both indoors and outdoors. Practice helped to ensure that children were accounted for at all times and that the environment was safe and secure. It included when children were outdoors in the wider community. It helped to ensure that activities were not compromised and that children were supported to enjoy fun play experiences. Using good practice guidance consistently to review/refresh practice and risk assessment, would help ensure safety and wellbeing of children is maintained, Ref: SIMOA (Safe, Inspect, Monitor, Observe, Act) and Keeping children safe practice notes - hub.careinspectorate.com

Overall, the indoor and outdoor environments had been sensitively structured and took account of the children's stages of development and learning. Leaders and staff should continue to arrange spaces to reflect children's interests and curiosities, focused on open ended (no fixed purpose) and real resources to invoke imagination and challenge.

How good is our leadership?

4 - Good

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

The vision for the setting had been reviewed with children, families and staff. It helped everyone to know what was important to the setting to meet the needs of children and families. Leaders were beginning to create conditions where all people felt well-informed to share responsibility for the change process.

There had been some opportunities for parents to share their views at parent's evening. Stay and play had been arranged for the 2-3 room, however, plans to introduce to the pre-school children had been postponed. Leaders advised that it was planned for after the school holidays and we discussed the benefits of meaningful parental involvement. Ref: Me, my family and my childcare setting: A practice note for building stronger connections and meaningful relationships - careinspectorate.com. Children had been involved in the evaluation of their environment, play activities, meals and snacks and we would encourage continuation of this practice. Parents agreed and strongly agreed that their child and them were involved in a meaningful way to help develop the service.

Staff had a clear understanding of their daily roles to help ensure smooth delivery of the service. Whole staff meetings had taken place that provided opportunity for reflection. A minute was completed and we discussed the benefits of a clear action plan with leaders. It helped to identify who had responsibility for action and enabled staff to be foster change improvement.

Leaders should continue to maintain the continuity of staff meetings that also promoted shared discussion and evaluation of practice, such as personal plans and observation/assessment of learning and skills. Leaders had established clear individual roles and responsibilities, they should be maintained to ensure strong leadership that helped to support staff confidence and aspirations.

The service improvement plan (SIP) was being used consistently to inform improvement in the quality of service to children and families. The support of the local authority early years team had enabled a new format of self-evaluation to monitor improvement to be established. It was enabling clarity of purpose and direction to be developed. We advised leaders to ensure that it measured positive change outcomes for children and families. Quality assurance systems that included observation and examination of practice to identify inconsistencies were being embedded. We advised leaders that these should be maintained to highlight areas for improvement that influenced change.

How good is our staff team?

4 - Good

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

Leaders recognised the importance of ensuring that the service was appropriately staffed during the day to support the wellbeing of children. Arrangements were in place to promote continuity of care across the day and ensure positive transitions and communication with families. Parents strongly agreed and agreed that they had a strong connection with the staff caring for their child.

Some parents indicated that they did not always feel informed of changes to the staff team. We discussed this with leaders and arrangements would be put in place to keep families informed of such changes.

Staff had different roles associated with their levels of experience, skills and knowledge. Daily responsibilities were shared between the staff to support children's experiences across the day. Staff breaks were planned to minimise the impact on the children whilst enabling staff to refresh.

Staff worked well together they communicated well with each other when a task took them away from their responsibilities, so that children continued to be supported. Regular check-ins and communications with staff helped to promote continuity of care and positive transitions such as lunch and drop off/pick up times. The nature of the service meant that some staff considered daily information was not always consistent. We discussed this with leaders and morning briefings would be introduced as a potential means of improving general communication.

Children experienced a warm and respectful atmosphere, staff interactions were caring and kind that was conducive to their wellbeing, confidence and self-esteem. This contributed to good outcomes for children.

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

To support children's current care needs and preferences, the provider should ensure that meeting needs, choices and wishes are planned for effectively in personal plans.

This is to ensure that meeting the needs of children is consistent with the Care Inspectorate guidance document, Guide for providers on Personal Planning Early Learning and Childcare.

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 1.15)

This area for improvement was made on 6 February 2023.

Action taken since then

Personal plans recorded children's individual needs and preferences the use of chronologies and the introduction of an alert folder also helped to ensure that children's needs were being met. The location of the personal plans had been changed so that they were readily accessible to all staff.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

To support children to experience sociable, enjoyable and relaxed snack and lunch times, the provider should improve mealtime experiences. This should include, but is not limited to increasing staff knowledge and competency to support practice consistent with guidance contained in the Care Inspectorate document: 'Food Matters'. And also the practice note: 'Keeping children safe: supporting positive mealtime experiences in Early Learning and Childcare'.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'I take part in daily routines, such as setting up activities and mealtimes, if this is what I want' (HSCS 2.21); and

'I can enjoy unhurried snack and meal times in as a relaxed an atmosphere as possible' (HSCS 1.35).

This area for improvement was made on 6 February 2023.

Action taken since then

Changes had been made to the snack and lunch provision so that it was a positive social experience for the children that was relaxed and enjoyable and also supported their independence skills.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 3

To support children's learning and development, including literacy and numeracy development, the provider should ensure that all children can choose from a range of good quality, developmentally appropriate resources which provoke curiosity, imagination and problem solving.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'As a child, I have fun as I develop my skills in understanding, thinking, investigation and problem solving, including through imaginative play and storytelling'. (HSCS 1.30)

This area for improvement was made on 6 February 2023.

Action taken since then

Children were able to participate in curious and imaginative play indoors and outdoors as there was range of resources both indoor and outdoors, that supported their literacy and numeracy development.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 4

To promote child-led play and learning, the provider should ensure that a balance of responsive and intentional planning, supports children's choice of activities and experiences.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state 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)

This area for improvement was made on 6 February 2023.

Action taken since then

Children were able to lead their own play and learning both indoors and outside and their ideas were beginning to influence activities. There was less expectation of children being directed to participate in group activities that interrupted their play. A balance of responsive and intentional planning was emerging.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 5

To promote play which supports children across their developmental stages, the service should provide a stimulating range of resources which foster imaginative play, creative thinking, problem solving and learning.

This should include but is not limited to:

a) Evaluating the variety and type of resources used with all ages of children; and

b) Where appropriate, replacing or removing old and worn resources.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state 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)

This area for improvement was made on 6 February 2023.

Action taken since then

The outdoor and indoor areas provided a wider choice of natural and real resources that provided a tactile feel and fostered imaginative thinking and problem solving that supported children's learning.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 6

To support improved outcomes for all service users, the provider should ensure that quality assurance processes are robust and transparent. This should include, but is not limited to:

- a) Regular opportunities for staff to participate in meaningful reflective and self-evaluative practice; and
- b) Fostering an ethos of continuous improvement which promotes children's, staff's and parents' ownership of change.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which states that:

'I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent, quality assurance processes'. (HSCS 4.19)

This area for improvement was made on 6 February 2023.

Action taken since then

The implementation of a quality assurance calendar was beginning to ensure that robust systems enabled all areas to be covered and evaluated. Children, families and staff been given opportunities to inform developments within the setting.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 7

To foster continuity of care which supports children's care, safety and wellbeing at all times, the provider should ensure that staff are deployed effectively and appropriately across the day. This should include but is not limited to taking staff skills, knowledge and experience into account.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which states that:

'I experience high quality care and support based on relevant evidence, guidance and best practice'. (HSCS 4.11)

This area for improvement was made on 6 February 2023.

Action taken since then

Staff were being deployed effectively and appropriately across the day to support continuity of care and children's safety and wellbeing.

This area for improvement has been 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	4 - Good
1.3 Play and learning	4 - Good
How good is our setting?	4 - Good
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	4 - 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?	4 - Good
4.3 Staff deployment	4 - Good

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