

Ballater School Nursery Day Care of Children

Ballater School
Monaltrie Crescent
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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
6 June 2024

Service provided by:
Aberdeenshire Council

Service provider number:
SP2003000029

Service no:
CS2003016306

About the service

Ballater School Nursery is provided by Aberdeenshire Council. The service operates from within the local primary school and is close to local amenities like shops and parks.

The service is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 24 children not yet attending primary school at any one time. Of those 24 children no more than 10 are aged two years to under three years.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 04 June 2024 between the hours of 08:30 and 16:30 and 05 June 2024 between the hours of 08:15 and 14:30. The inspection was carried out by an 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 during their play.
- Spoke with four parents as they dropped off their children.
- Received two parent/carer online questionnaires.
- Received four 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 had developed good relationships with parents, they felt well informed and involved their child's experiences and learning.
- Staff were passionate about their role and were keen to extend their professional development to further improve outcomes for children.
- Strong leadership ensured a culture of continuous improvement.

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

Staff were very 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 was 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 and dislikes and anything they were supporting them with. 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 was well supported through effective personal planning. Each plan contained registration information and captured the children's likes and 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 ensured that all staff were 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.

Mealtimes were a relaxed, social experience for the children, allowing them to eat at a pace which suited them. Rolling snack, both indoor and outside, gave the children choice and ensured their play wasn't interrupted. 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. Parents told us that their child could choose from a range of healthy snacks and meals every day.

The setting's policy detailed how they would safely manage the administration of medication. Medication was stored safely in accordance with current best practice. We asked that the setting include a section to record signs and symptoms within the medication form and this was immediately actioned. This ensured that all essential information was available to staff within the medication form, contributing to the children's health and wellbeing.

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 appropriate use of PPE (personal protective equipment) and an appropriate changing unit being used.

Quality indicator 1.3: Play and learning

Children were very happy and fully engaged in play throughout their day. A very good range of age appropriate resources, including loose parts and open-ended resources were on offer, in both indoor and outdoor environments.

While playing in the wooded area with loose parts we saw a child change a seesaw into a 'helicopter propeller'. The child asked if they could make a 'helicopter propeller'. Staff used open questions to support the child's thinking, asking 'what do you need?'. The child started to move planks of wood onto a large wooden cube. They sat on it and tried to turn it, this wasn't working so they put a wooden cube in between the planks and tried again. The child was problem solving and persevering to succeed while the adult stood back observing. The child then took away the cube in between and the adult asked 'is this one', pointing to the longer plank, 'the right size do you think?'. They started to look at and compare the sizes of the planks, the child said 'this one matches' as they put it on top. The child sat on top of the planks and started to spin round, delighted they were working saying 'it's a choppers propeller'. Another child showed interest and wanted to make one too, they started to work together. This promoted children's curiosity and encouraged them to be creative, problem solve together, and use their imagination. The use of open questions encouraged thinking and enabled the children to succeed with their creation.

A child-led approach to learning had been considered and implemented. Children were seen to be very independent and could choose where and what they played with. We could see lots of shelves and baskets available with a variety of resources to choose from. Children mixed their own paints outdoors and collected resources for the mud kitchen. They accessed resources easily and knew where to find them to support their play and learning. Parents told us their children's learning was always supported through interesting and fun play experiences including outdoor learning.

Language, literacy and numeracy experiences were very good and woven throughout the provision. These included clocks, calendars, recipe books, scales, old phones, a type writer, measuring tapes and rulers. We saw staff encouraging mathematical language during play, for example when filling up jars in the mud kitchen. There were discussions around full, nearly full, too much. Children used chalk to keep tally scores during a ball throwing game. They used recipe cards to support their play in the mud kitchen. Children paid for their snack on a daily basis therefore becoming familiar with using coins. Staff spontaneously sang with the children during play and read stories to them in groups and individually. Early writing promoted the development of fine motor skills and a range of mark making materials were available throughout the environment. A staff member was fluent in British Sign Language (BSL) and we saw the children taking a great interest in this, some enjoyed looking at the book of signs in the nursery and others spontaneously asked what the signs for certain things were for example, during lunchtime. This supported the children's early language, literacy and numeracy development.

Staff explained their approach to planning and we could see that responsive and intentional planning had been taken into account. The setting was using the Aberdeenshire progression frameworks to track children's progress helping to support and monitor development. Staff told us that this, alongside using success criteria within planning enabled them to have a clear understanding of the children's progress helped identify where support was needed. A learning wall, Achievement Tree and Floor books were being used to capture each child's voice and plan for next steps. These also allowed children to look back and reflect on their experiences. Children enjoyed showing us these and were able to talk about their experiences and learning. This supported them to build on life skills, such as questioning, memory, investigating, and explaining.

Learning journals were used to document observations and capture individual children's learning. Staff told us that they had benefited from training and support around recording observations. We saw that observations were well written, contained an overview of child development and were linked to each of the curricular areas. They also included next steps. These were shared with children and parents and supported the development of planning children's experiences, offering individualised support, and providing children with challenge and depth to learning. We saw that parental contributions were valued and shared within the setting at together time, on the smart board and on the achievement tree. Parents told us they were involved in their children's learning and next steps were shared with them. One parent told us that when their child was doing an activity at home or achieved something, they were asked to take pictures for nursery as part of parental contribution. This allowed families and children to feel like partners in their learning and development.

We saw that Ballater was a close knit community and children's opportunities were enhanced through very good connections with the wider community. Family members were invited into the nursery to share their cultures, read stories and tell children about their jobs. The setting used the local shops to source resources, such as the antique shop for the old phones and typewriter. The children visited the library regularly and the local care home to read stories and sing using BSL they had learned at nursery. Following an interest developed about emergency services, the police, fire, ambulance and mountain rescue services visited the setting which had been documented and shared on the learning wall. The community were involved in a recent fundraiser. Children took part in a sunhat stroll and decorated hats which had been placed in shop windows by the local businesses for children to spot on their walks. Locals came out to greet the children and donate to the nursery. These experiences supported a real sense of belonging within the 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 well maintained and secure with plenty of natural light and ventilation. Resources such as hessian on the walls, greenery and lighting were added to soften the atmosphere within the rooms. These all helped create a very welcoming feel to the service. Children's work and photographs were displayed throughout the setting, giving the children a sense of ownership and belonging. Children were observed to move around the spaces with confidence, while being able to choose where they played. Children had the opportunity to play indoors or outside with an effective free flow system in place.

Indoor spaces were set up thoughtfully using furniture to create areas for the children to explore. We saw a very good variety of resources and provocations to play supported different play experiences. These included 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 wide range of resources to support learning including open ended resources such as wooden planks, reels and crates, wooden climbing frames, a mud kitchen, large sand pit as well as shelters for the children. Although the direct outdoor area was predominately concrete with matting, the children accessed the wooded area of the school playground which ensured the children had the opportunity to explore and learn in different environments. Parents told us their children had the opportunity to play outdoors. One parent said "My child loves playing in the woods and also the sand pit".

Generally, infection control measures ensured a clean, safe environment for children. We observed effective 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 tooth brushing and food preparation. However, we found that laundry services operated within the nappy changing area. Best practice guidance states that nappy changing facilities should be designated for that use only, they should be separate from laundry areas. The setting was aware of the guidance and after seeking advice, had put a risk assessment in place to support the children's health and wellbeing. We asked that the setting reconsidered the laundry operating within the nappy changing area. The authority have since visited the setting and confirmed that the appliances will be moved from the nappy changing area, this will ensure children were kept safe and well from infection. **(See area for improvement 1)**

Risk benefit assessments had been produced 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. Children were encouraged to risk assess their environment, being involved in garden checks and encouraging them to think about their own safety. Accidents and incidents were documented well, and information was shared with parents. These were then audited and action taken if necessary. This contributed to the safety and wellbeing of staff and children.

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.

Areas for improvement

1. 1. The service should ensure that children have access to appropriate nappy changing facilities and receive personal care in an environment that supports high levels of infection, prevention and control.

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

'If I require intimate personal care, there is a suitable area for this, including a sink if needed' (HSCS 5.4).

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 nursery's vision, values and aims had recently been updated involving staff, children and parents. We saw that they had held an interactive workshop and used questionnaires to involve the parents. Mind maps were used with children and a staff to gain thoughts and ideas. This ensured that these shared vision, values and aims captured what was important to all using the service and working there.

We saw that parental engagement had been on the setting's improvement plan. We noted that they were working hard to establish a strong connection between themselves and families. Online Learning journals allowed the service and families to share experiences and learning.

Parents were welcomed into the nursery which enabled face-to-face chats between parents and staff about the children's day. Stay and play sessions and workshops were offered to parents for example, to explore literacy and promote a shared vision for the setting. The service used informal and more formal ways to gather feedback. Families were encouraged to leave comments in floor books, give feedback at workshops and were consulted through questionnaires. We saw that the setting acted upon these to drive change and improvement for example, management are about to roll out 'The HENRY approach', working with parents to support positive family lifestyles. Children and families' views were greatly valued which supported the service's ongoing improvements. Parents told us that they felt involved in a meaningful way to develop the service.

Staff expressed that they felt well supported by their team and management. Staff told us that their wellbeing needs were recognised and supported by leaders. One staff member said; "I have regular opportunities to liaise with both my EYSP and HT. This includes daily conversations, regular staff meetings and PPP (personal performance plan) meetings, where my individual and personal goals and training needs are discussed and planned". Another said; "I have no concerns and feel I am supported and checked in on how I am by the lead and senior".

Staff meetings, monitoring and of practice, PPP meetings and support and supervision were in place which supported staff well. We saw that this allowed staff to be meaningfully involved in self evaluation which enabled them to identify strengths and consider what could be improved to support improvement within the service. This encouraged staff to reflect on their practice to bring about improved outcomes for children and families.

The Local Authority quality assurance document, known as the RAG document, had supported the setting to identify areas for improvement. Action plans, were then used to support improvement and document developments. The service 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. The setting should consider using success criteria with their floor books to evaluate their improvements and consider whether there is a need for further development or if the outcome had influenced further improvements.

The nursery was using a quality assurance calendar to effectively support the procedures, audits and monitoring within the nursery. These were evaluated and shared with staff to ensure everyone was clear and knew the outcome and the impact of these.

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 very warm and responsive in their approach. They joined in children's play and followed their interests. All staff knew the individual needs and interests of the children which allowed them to offer individualised support and care. We found the staff team to be very enthusiastic and motivated and our discussions highlighted that they were very passionate about their role.

Children appeared confident, happy and engaged in their play. They were 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. We observed that positive relationships had been formed between staff, children and parents.

Parents told us they had a strong connection with the staff caring for their children. One parent said; "Staff are kind, caring and friendly".

Staff communicated very well and were flexible and moved with children depending on their interests and needs. They asked each other for support and also offered support to colleagues. They used walkies talkies very well to communicate with each other when some staff were outdoors. Staffing levels throughout the day supported the wellbeing and safety of children using the service.

Staff were appropriately qualified with and had a good knowledge of child development. Some staff were working towards gaining further relevant qualifications. They were able to discuss how they had identified areas for development and were supporting children with their social skills, sensory play, and personal care.

We noted that staff had undertaken regular training and were very 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. For example, recent outdoor training had supported the staff to consider further developing experiences on offer to the children outdoors. The staff had already raised funds in order to purchase resources such as real tools, ropes, materials and a fire bowl to enrich outdoor learning experiences for the children.

The setting had an induction programme in place to support students, relief and new staff. This comprised of a check list with targets and expected outcomes. In a recently updated policy the setting had already included the 'Early Learning and Childcare National Induction Resource' and planned to use this to support inductions going forward, encouraging questions and reflection. This would support staff to have a better understanding of their roles, responsibilities, and effective ways of working.

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

In order to ensure children are supported to achieve their potential staff should:

- Undertake meaningful observations that identify children's learning.
- Identify suitable, challenging and appropriate possible next steps.
- Plan experiences that follow children's interests and enhance their learning.

This is to ensure that high quality care is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state that, as a child, 'I am supported to achieve my potential in education and employment if this is right for me' (HSCS 1.27).

This area for improvement was made on 4 June 2019.

Action taken since then

Responsive and intentional planning had been taken into account. The setting were tracking children's progress to support and monitor development. Using success criteria within planning and tracking was enabling them to have a clear understanding of the children's progress helped identify where support was needed. A learning wall, Achievement Tree and Floor books were being used to capture each child's voice and plan for next steps. These also allowed children to look back and reflect on their experiences.

Learning journals were being used to document observations. Staff had benefited from training and support around writing observations. Observations were well written and included next steps. These were shared with children and parents and supported the development of planning children's experiences, offering individualised support, and providing children with challenge and depth to learning.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

To ensure children are effectively supported to progress and achieve their potential staff should develop their skills and knowledge of:

- Observation, assessment and planning
- Effective interaction to support and extend learning

This is to ensure that high quality care is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state that, as a child, 'I have confidence in people because they are trained, competent and skilled, are able to reflect on their practice and follow their professional and organisational codes' (HSCS 3.14).

This area for improvement was made on 4 June 2019.

Action taken since then

Staff had undertaken training in planning, tracking and observations. This was now being used effectively to plan interesting and relevant experiences for children. Support and challenge was in place to enhance learning. Continued staff monitoring of planning and observations, allowed management to identify where staff required support, which had been put in place.

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?	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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