

Little Acorns Day Nursery Day Care of Children

Royal Cornhill Hospital
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Aberdeen
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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
6 June 2024

Service provided by:
NHS Grampian

Service provider number:
SP2003000363

Service no:
CS2003001643

About the service

Little Acorns Day Nursery is provided by NHS Grampian for the benefit of NHS staff. It is registered to provide a day care of children service for a maximum of 108 children at any one time from birth to those not yet attending primary school.

The service operates from a modern, two storey (with lift access to the first floor), purpose-built accommodation within the grounds of the Royal Cornhill Hospital, Aberdeen, close to a wide range of shops and parks. There is car parking on site and public transport links nearby. Children have daily access to the safe and enclosed nursery gardens and a wooded area.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Monday 3 June 2024 between 09:30 and 17:00, Tuesday 4 June 2024 between 09:30 and 18:00 and Thursday 6 June 2024 between 09:40 and 15:45. 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 using the service as they played and learned
- Spoke with two parents and reviewed written feedback provided to us from 18 parents and carers
- Spoke with staff and management
- Observed practice and daily routines
- Reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Children were very well supported by staff who were consistently responsive to their needs.
- Staff worked proactively with children, families and key external professionals to support children's individual needs and to help them achieve and flourish.
- The staff team had established very good connections with the wider community which provided a range of positive experiences for the children and enhanced their play and learning.
- The team, along with the support of families had worked very hard to develop the wooded area into a rich play and learning environment for the children.
- The manager led the service very well and was committed to developing the service by empowering the staff team and creating many opportunities for families to be involved.
- Children and families were supported by a motivated and skilled staff team who worked closely with each other to provide high quality, inclusive experiences for all children.

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 evaluated this key question as very good where there were significant strengths which supported positive outcomes for children.

1.1 Nurturing care and support

Children benefitted from staff who were caring and nurturing in their approach. We observed this consistently throughout the inspection and received very positive feedback from parents and carers. Children were gently encouraged to develop their skills. Their achievements were recognised, supporting them to develop in confidence. One parent told us, "...it always feels like the staff really do care about the children" and another that, "I feel my child is safe and loved at all times in their care."

Staff knew the children very well and used this knowledge to support children's individual needs, including food allergies and intolerances, dietary preferences, and emotional support. This information was reflected in children's personal plans. One parent told us that, "Every staff member knows your child so well. Staff from each room remember your child. It is very much feels like a family - just a very large one."

Very detailed information was in place for children with additional support needs. Staff were aware of this information and used it to support the children. Children presented as settled throughout our visits and well regulated. Individual support plans contained a high level of information. We suggested that these be reviewed and updated to ensure that key information about individual children's needs and how they are to be supported is easy to find.

Children benefitted from a pleasant and relaxing lunch experience. It was well organised so children did not have long to wait once seated until the food arrived. Mealtimes were well supported by staff who sat with the children, supervised them well and provided assistance dependent on individual needs. They were unhurried and children reminded to take their time while eating and not to put too much in their mouth at one time. This all helped to support safer eating practices. There were some opportunities for children to develop their independence skills, such as pouring their own drinks and tidying away their plates and cutlery. This should continue to be built on, for example self serving, so that children are increasingly developing their skills. Staff eating alongside the children would also help to add to the social experience and provide positive role modelling for the children.

Staff encouraged and supported the children to drink throughout the day which supported their hydration.

Children's personal care was supported by staff using a consistent respectful and nurturing approach. Staff used these opportunities as nice one to one time to build on positive relationships.

Sleep routines were effectively organised to support a smooth transition. Staff recognised when children were tired and needed to rest and facilitated this. A nice, relaxed atmosphere was created to support a relaxing and calm environment. Rooms were darkened and soft lullaby music was used. Children were supported to go to sleep in their preferred position with their own comforters if needed. Staff sat with them, helped them to settle with rubbing their back or tummy and using a gentle tone of voice.

Children's medication was stored well and records were in place to ensure that safe administration of medication was undertaken. Medication care plans should be further developed to highlight how staff would

know if medication was not working and what action then needs to be taken. This information was in place for some children who have an additional allergy action plan from their health professional but not for others.

The team were very good at working with families and external professionals to identify appropriate next steps and strategies for children and supporting transitions for school. The team were very proactive in making contact with key professionals and arranging meetings with family and key external professionals to ensure children's needs were being progressed. A parent described a high level of support from the team, and in particular the manager in relation to accessing resources and support.

1.3 Play and learning

Children were supported by staff who were focused on children's right to play. High quality play, learning and development opportunities were available to children throughout the day. As a result, children were fully immersed in various activities and experienced joy. Activities were child led, focusing on their particular interests and passions.

Lots of reading was taking place around the nursery on one to one or in small groups which supported children's literacy. Attractive reading areas where books were attractively displayed, puppets were available and comfortable seating present encouraged children's interest.

The team worked hard to support children's speech and language development. Simple language was used with younger children and children with communication issues, along with the use of repetition. Regular singing took place throughout our visits and was really enjoyed. Makaton, a recognised universal communication tool using symbols, hand signs and speech, was being used upstairs and downstairs. A number of staff had received formal training and were supporting the children to learn some key words. Children's individualised speech and language needs were being well supported. The team were planning to further improve how they supported children's communication needs.

Loose parts and open-ended resources could be further developed to help children being more creative in their play and support opportunities for numeracy. The home corners, for example, would benefit from more items that can be sorted, carried, enveloped, mixed, measured and poured such as pine cones, pom poms and dried pasta and resources to do this with including jugs, bowls, handbags, tubs and spoons.

Children experienced positive and engaging play and learning experiences throughout our visits. We saw babies fully immersed in a whole body painting activity and both the children and the staff experiencing joy sharing this fun session. Outdoor play was encouraged and supported and we saw children really enjoying bug hunting and imaginative play. The nursery had developed a wooded area over the past few years and it provided a rich play and learning environment for the children. Children were encouraged to engage in risky play, encouraged and supported by staff to identify manageable and safe risk. Parent and carers fed back very positively about the children's outdoor experiences. One told us that, "We particularly value the amount of outdoor play - these areas are being continuously developed and provide a wealth of options for creative play, developing motor skills, social skills, learning about nature, messy play etc." Another that, "They went on Gruffalo hunts in the woods, to the skate park with balance bikes, water play, making hot chocolate on the camp fire."

Strong connections to the wider community were evident. Children visited the extensive local parks and regularly visited the range of local shops for nursery resources they participated in choosing. A parent told us about a much enjoyed trip of children taking local transport to visit a local science centre. Another told us that, "They have lots of opportunities to go explore local shops/parks/city centre. I feel they are privileged

with such an array of resources at such a young age." Children also regularly visited a nearby care home for older people where they met with residents and participated in shared activities. These inter generational opportunities supported the children with their communication and language skills, empathy, and confidence. It also supported enhanced wellbeing for both the children and the older people they were visiting and was valued by parents and carers. Weekly visits from a therapist also took place which were a huge favourite of the children. These visits supported the children to learn about caring for animals, keeping safe and being responsible.

Interactive learning diaries (ILD's) were in place which helped to track children's learning and achievement and was shared with parents and carers. Observations of the children's play and learning were really well written. They described what was happening in the accompanying photographs and identified the skill or learning. Children's next steps - how they could progress further could be developed to ensure that they are more targeted and achievable. This was discussed with staff who were keen to make suggested improvements.

How good is our setting?

5 - Very Good

We evaluated this key question as very good where there were significant strengths which supported positive outcomes for children.

2.2. Children experience high quality facilities

Children benefitted from an environment which was well furnished and homely and inviting. The entrance area and corridors had been decorated with lots of attractively presented information which helped to promote engagement with families.

Playrooms were good sized and were bright and well ventilated. Furniture was of a high quality and had well set out play and learning zones. The playrooms could be further enhanced with a range of loose parts and real life resources to support different learning experiences.

Fish tanks with a variety of different tropical fish were found in the entrance area and the older children's playrooms, supporting some children's interests in pets and helping to create a calming environment.

There had been a real focus on improving the outdoor space over the past few years. Children benefitted from a lovely wooded area which was owned by and sited next to the nursery. Children, staff and families had worked in partnership to develop it into a very inviting and creative space. Each room has a day a week to use it and it provided opportunities to explore a more natural environment. We saw children climbing trees and being supported by staff to assess risk and consider how to keep safe. We highlighted the need to further develop the services risk assessment and further enhance staff knowledge relating to trees in the wooded area which would be toxic if parts were ingested by a child. Action was taken by the manager and staff to address this fully and comprehensively prior to the inspection being completed. Welcoming and well resourced outdoor spaces were in place for each room. The children were outdoors a lot in all four rooms which supported their physical and mental health.

Children were regularly supported to wash their hands at key times of the day to support infection prevention and control. Staff were also mindful of the need to wash their hands on a regular basis and following key activities. The environment was clean at all times with staff using opportunities throughout the day to maintain a healthy environment.

Nappy changing was found to be in line with best practice apart from the need to ensure that staff wash their hands before the first nappy change they undertake. Discussion with staff about this and a clear visual guide had been put in place before the inspection was concluded. We discussed the need for the setting to develop a plan for nappy changing to ensure that it meets the current Care Inspectorate guidance 'Nappy changing for early learning and childcare settings (excluding childminders) (see area for improvement 1).

Areas for improvement

1. To support high levels of infection prevention and control the provider should develop a plan, complete with timescales to ensure that children's personal care practices are consistent with the Care Inspectorate document 'Nappy changing for early learning and childcare settings (excluding childminders).'

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

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

'My environment is secure and safe' (HSCS 5.19).

How good is our leadership?

5 - Very Good

We evaluated this key question as very good where there were significant strengths which supported positive outcomes for children.

3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well

Children and families were supported by a team who were very committed to ongoing improvement. Staff participated in various focus groups which met regularly to reflect on what they were doing well, what they could improve and how they could do this. For example, the outdoor focus group had been continuing to develop the wooded area. The audit group had plans to further improve the systems in place to support children's communication using a total communication approach (accepting and using all forms of communication, verbal and non verbal equally). The team were using a range of best practice guidance to help them reflect on their service and identify what they are doing well and what they could improve.

An action plan was in place and was comprehensive and outcome focused, clearly highlighting how the actions to be undertaken would have a positive outcome for children. It was clear what the team had been working on and how this had progressed, for example working on mealtimes and developing the outdoor space. The action plan was regularly reviewed to ensure that actions were kept on track and progressed.

Children and families views were actively sought to inform the development of the service. Very regular feedback was sought from the children including resources for the nursery. Children also participated in the enterprise focus group. They had, for example, made jam and sold this to parents and then used the profits to think about resources they would like for nursery. Children were actively involved in the recruitment process for new staff. They met with and engaged with potential candidates and provided their feedback which was used as part of the decision making process. Parents and carers were continually asked for their feedback using a variety of methods. We noted very strong partnership working with families, many of whom provided physical support to develop the nursery environment together with the staff. The staff team were very dedicated, giving up their time at the weekends to spend time improving the nursery.

The manager was very proactive in making changes based on our feedback throughout the inspection. Changes made were done very thoroughly and thinking about how this supported positive outcomes for the children.

Staff observed each others practice and provided feedback (peer monitoring) and managers also undertook observations of individual practice and the room as a whole. Findings were then used to improve practice and the environment.

How good is our staff team?

5 - Very Good

We evaluated this key question as very good where there were significant strengths which supported positive outcomes for children.

4.3 Staff deployment

The nursery was appropriately staffed by a very committed staff team. This helped to ensure that every child received high quality care and learning experiences and that they were kept safe. A parent told us that staff "Go above and beyond, teach, encourage, allow choices to be made. They are amazing."

Children enjoyed positive and engaging one to one support and small group activities due to high staffing levels. Breaks were well managed to ensure that key times of the day were well supported, including for lunch and drop off and collection times. This ensured that staff were consistently able to respond to changing needs very quickly.

There was a very low turnover of staff within the nursery and a number of staff had worked at the setting for many years. This helped to provide continuity of care and this was much valued by parents and carers. Staff were committed to making sure they undertook regular training to keep their knowledge and practice up to date.

Children were supported by a skilled team who communicated and worked well together. Staff spoke positively about team working and that the relationships between people in the team were strong.

At all times staff were positioned very well within the nursery to ensure children were supervised and supported. This ensured that staff responded quickly to any potential hazards or to children's changing needs. The quality of engagement with children throughout the day, both indoors and outdoors, was very good with staff being fully attuned to what each child needed individually. Children were happy and settled throughout the day and were always positively engaged in an activity. Children were kept safe by staff who supervised the children very carefully by positioning staff carefully and being very observant. Regular head counts were undertaken to ensure all children were accounted for.

The team were knowledgeable and skilled. The staff were very motivated and were keen and committed to the continual development of the service. Team members were supported and encouraged to take on more responsibility and leadership roles which helped them to develop their knowledge, skills and confidence. Staff were enthusiastic, happy and engaged which helped to foster a very positive atmosphere.

Attendance levels were very good with unplanned absences being low. The management team were all supernumerary so could and did support the rooms where required.

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

The provider should review their first aid policy, procedure, and practice to ensure that staff have the knowledge, understanding, and critical thinking skills to make informed decisions about providing treatment and seeking medical advice.

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

'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 28 November 2023.

Action taken since then

The service's accident and first aid policy had been reviewed and updated. It has been shared and discussed with the staff team. It provided clear information to staff about action to be taken where a child needs immediate medical attention or becomes unconscious. Staff were confident about their role in responding effectively to accidents and incidents.

An updated accident form had been developed which provided more detailed information for parents and carers. It also allowed the staff team an opportunity to note down and review how the child was following any accidents.

This area for improvement has been fully met.

Previous area for improvement 2

The provider should ensure that when staff need to call parents to inform them of an accident or incident, that parents should be given as much information as possible. This will allow them to consider the best course of action for their child.

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

'If I am unable to make my own decisions at any time, the views of those who know my wishes, such as my carer, independent advocate, formal or informal representative, are sought and taken into account' (HSCS 2.12).

This area for improvement was made on 28 November 2023.

Action taken since then

The updated accident and first aid policy provided guidance about information that must be passed on to parents and carers in the event of an accident or incident. The updated accident form had been designed to provide more detailed information for parents and carers. We saw evidence of parents and carers being provided with full information in response to accidents and incidents.

This area for improvement has been fully met.

Complaints

Please see Care Inspectorate website (www.careinspectorate.com) for details of complaints about the service which have been upheld.

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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