

Little Staggies ELC Day Care of Children

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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
23 July 2024

Service provided by:
Little Staggies ELC Ltd

Service provider number:
SP2019013402

Service no:
CS2019377651

About the service

Little Staggies ELC is situated on the outskirts of the town of Dingwall, in the Ross-Shire area of the Highlands.

The service was registered with the Care Inspectorate on 20 December 2019. The service is managed and provided by a private provider and is in partnership with the Highland Council to deliver funded early learning and childcare. It is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 48 children at one time. Of those no more than nine are ages under two years, no more than 15 are aged two to under three years and no more than 24 are aged three to those not yet of an age to attend primary school.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Tuesday 16 and Wednesday 17 July 2024, with feedback on Tuesday 23 July 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 15 children attending the service.
- Reviewed feedback from 11 parents and carers.
- Spoke with staff and management.
- Observed practice and daily life.
- Reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Children experienced warm and caring support from staff.
- Personal plans should be further developed and routinely reviewed to ensure they contain up to date information, including strategies of support.
- Children benefited from leading their own play and learning.
- Planning processes required improvement.
- The use of open ended materials could be extended further across all playrooms to offer more creative learning and imaginative play experiences.
- Arrangements for the monitoring, maintenance and repair of the premises, furnishings and equipment needed to be improved.
- Quality assurance processes and self evaluation were not yet effective in promoting 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?	3 - Adequate
How good is our setting?	3 - Adequate
How good is our leadership?	3 - Adequate
How good is our staff team?	3 - Adequate

Further details on the particular areas inspected are provided at the end of this report.

How good is our care, play and learning?

3 - Adequate

We made an evaluation of adequate for this quality indicator, as several important strengths taken together just outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 1.1 Nurturing care and support

Most children were happy and confident within the nursery environment. Children knew the routines and most approached staff with confidence to seek support. We observed staff providing comfort, reassurance, cuddles and warmth to children when required as well as sharing laughter and fun taking part in activities outdoors. Staff communicated with children down at their level in a gentle and sensitive manner.

Following the last inspection, an area for improvement was identified in relation to personal planning. We had previously found that although staff generally knew the care and support needs, preferences and routines for the majority of the children attending. The written personal planning information was inconsistent, not necessarily up to date and not routinely completed and reviewed with parents. This had resulted in staff not always having the most up to date information and understanding of the specific needs of the children and how best to support them. Unfortunately, only limited progress had been made, in part due to the changing staff team. We saw some evidence that personal plans were being monitored on a regular basis by the manager with feedback being provided to keyworkers. The manager was hopeful that with a more consistent staff team in each of the playrooms, this area for improvement would be fully met in due course.

Parents acknowledged that the ongoing changes within the staff team had caused some concerns and uncertainty. However, since the previous inspection, parents were more positive about the level and quality of communication they had with the manager and staff. Parents felt welcomed at the nursery and appreciated being able to go into the playroom to collect their child at the end of the day. The majority of parents, who offered feedback to us, stated that they received information about their child's day and what activities they had taken part in. However, some parents were of the opinion that the information they received could be more specific about their child and their progress. The manager highlighted that communication and quality of feedback to parents was now an identified action point within the service's improvement plan and training and support was to be given to staff. The manager acknowledged that greater use could be made of the online app used by the service to share information with parents, especially in relation to their own children's progression and next steps. Further observation training was to be offered to all staff.

Children's health was promoted through a selection of nutritionally balanced home cooked meals. There was a new chef in post. We saw that staff and children sat together during lunch. The children enjoyed their lunch and the opportunity to chat to each other. Children were being supported to develop their independence skills. For example, children in the pre-school room were able to self serve lunch and their drinks. Staff praised and encouraged the children as they ate and were on hand to help them as needed. Lunch was a sociable event, where staff supported children to develop their language and communication skills.

Quality indicator 1.3 Play and learning

The inspection took place during consecutive sunny days, therefore the children were outside for the majority of the day. We saw children who were having fun taking part in various activities including water play, sand play and messy play outdoors. However, there were also children who, at times, were disengaged and would have benefited from skilled input and support from staff.

The staff team included staff who did not yet have the experience and knowledge to consistently interact with children in a highly skilled manner. They did, however, show children respect and kindness. As a result, children felt valued and respected. We spoke with the manager regarding the importance of good role models and effective monitoring of practice to support newer staff to grow in confidence and skills.

Following the previous inspection, an area for improvement was identified in relation to children having access to a wider range of quality resources and experiences to encourage imaginative play, offer challenge, spark curiosity and increase the opportunities for children to extend and consolidate their learning through play. Unfortunately, there had been only limited improvements and the area for improvement will be continued and followed up at the next inspection. On the first day of the inspection, there were only limited resources available to the children, especially indoors. There were limited opportunities to extend learning around numeracy and literacy both indoors and outdoors, while the sensory area was very uninviting with minimal sensory experiences. On the second day of the inspection, there were more resources, activities and experiences available to the children both indoors and outdoors. Children were generally more engaged and having fun as they consolidated their learning through play.

Quality and frequency of written observations was something which had been previously identified as an area for development. Training on the making and recording of quality observations had been provided to staff. As part of the inspection, we looked at a selection of the observations of children's experiences, progression and next steps which were shared with parents via the online app. The manager acknowledged that only minimal progress had been made in terms of the frequency and quality of the observations. Support and appropriate training should continue to be provided to all staff to develop their skills and understanding in relation to monitoring and tracking children's learning and progress. This would add value to the children's experience and ensure they are fully supported and challenged.

How good is our setting?

3 - Adequate

We made an evaluation of adequate for this quality indicator, as several important strengths taken together just outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 2.2 Children experience high quality facilities

There were three playrooms, each with direct access to enclosed outdoor play areas. The premises were secure with a door entry system in place. Staff were able to monitor who entered and left the building with the use of a camera security system. This meant the children were kept safe in the nursery and as they played outdoors.

Some of the areas of the nursery were found to be neglected, unclean or poorly maintained. For example, some soft furnishings were grubby, the designated sensory area was disorganised and had minimal sensory experiences and within the playrooms walls were dirty. We shared our findings with the manager and they agreed some of the issues found were not acceptable. By the end of the inspection, the manager had arranged for a deep clean of the setting and for the playrooms to be repainted.

The manager should ensure that arrangements for the monitoring, maintenance and repair of the premises, furnishings and equipment are sufficient.

Risk assessments were used to promote children's safety. These identified potential hazards and mitigating actions to be taken to reduce any risk to children in the setting. We discussed with the manager the need to have in place more robust risk assessments for walks and visits in the local community. We also reminded them to ensure that all risk assessments were routinely reviewed and updated where appropriate.

The nappy changing facilities should be reviewed to ensure that they meet current best practice guidance. We signposted management to the Care Inspectorate; 'Nappy changing for early learning and childcare settings (excluding Childminders.)' Any improvements made should meet required standards. This will support good infection control, the health and wellbeing of children, and ensure that children's dignity and privacy are protected during personal care.

How good is our leadership? 3 - Adequate

We made an evaluation of adequate for this quality indicator, as several important strengths taken together just outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well

Only minimal progress had been made in relation to embedding quality assurance processes. The manager explained that in the last four months, there had been further substantial changes within the staff team which had impacted on all areas of the service and outcomes for children.

The manager and staff engaged in the inspection process and appreciated the guidance and the signposting to various websites and best practice offered by the inspector. The manager and the staff demonstrated their commitment to the service and were motivated to make improvements to ensure positive outcomes for children. Staff in the different playrooms discussed what changes they had already introduced to improve outcomes and experiences for the children.

As the processes to support quality assurance, including self evaluation, were still in their early stages, they were not yet resulting in positive improvements within the service or improved experiences or outcomes for children. There was a improvement plan in place which focussed on the areas for improvement identified following the previous inspection. There were identified action points however they did not all have clear timescales and there was no evidence that any had been reviewed or their impact evaluated.

Staff had being encouraged to be more involved in self evaluation processes and critically reflect on their practice. Self evaluation floor books had been introduced in each of the playrooms. However, due to the challenges of staffing over recent months, there had been no work done with these.

Robust and regular monitoring systems, including self-evaluation, need to be more firmly embedded with a focus on monitoring children's personal plans, children's experiences and monitoring of staff practice. Having a robust system of quality assurance will ensure that improvements are sustained, and children continually benefit from a service that improves.

How good is our staff team?**3 - Adequate**

We made an evaluation of adequate for this quality indicator, as several important strengths taken together just outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 4.3 Staff Deployment

Since the last inspection four months ago, the service had continued to experience a high number of changes to the staff team which had impacted on staff deployment. We acknowledged that retention of staff had been challenging for many services within the early years sector. The manager explained that they had just become fully staffed and now had more qualified staff than previously. Having so many changes to the staff team had resulted in children not always experiencing consistent care and the quality of play and learning the children experienced had also been affected.

As part of the inspection, parents were invited to provide feedback. The majority of parents provided positive feedback in relation to staffing. Comments made included; 'Although there has been a turnover of staff, everyone there is professional and go out of their way to know who the children are', 'We get on very well with the established staff who know our daughter well' and 'I have found the staff to be very friendly and warm'.

Staff were friendly and welcoming with promoted a happy and secure environment where children felt valued, loved and secure. Staff engaged in the inspection process, were responsive to suggestions and showed a commitment to making improvements to support good outcomes for children. The staff team had only been working together for an extremely short period of time, however we did observe some positive team working. Staff communication was respectful and polite. For example, they informed each other if leaving the room to do a task.

New staff received an induction, which covered important information needed to care for children as well as important policies and procedures. We recommended that the manager continued to make use of good practice guidance including; 'Early Learning and Childcare - The National Induction Resource' to support staff who were new to the setting. The manager should ensure that support and supervision sessions are routinely provided for all staff as well as annual appraisals. This would support team development and working relationships.

There was a mixture of skills, knowledge and experience in the staff team. Most staff had taken part in core training such as child protection, food hygiene, first aid and infection control. However, there were areas where more skill and proactive professional development was needed.

The deployment and levels of staff were not always sufficient to ensure high quality outcomes for children. At times during the inspection, we observed children's experiences being compromised and their wishes and choices were not always respected. For example, children being directed by staff to remain out in the garden even though they clearly wished to return indoors. There were also missed opportunities for extending play and learning to support children to reach their potential.

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 meet children's health, welfare and safety needs, the manager should continue to review and develop children's personal plans and identify appropriate strategies to meet children's needs, support progress and help children to achieve their full potential. These plans should be reviewed at least every six months.

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 1.1).

This area for improvement was made on 30 January 2024.

Action taken since then

The manager acknowledged that due to the ongoing changes to the staff team, only limited improvements had been made to personal planning. The management team explained that they would continue to monitor personal plans as part of their quality assurance of the service.

The manager advised that all staff, especially newer staff, would continue to receive appropriate levels of support and guidance to ensure that they had the knowledge and skills necessary to review and develop children's personal plans and identify appropriate strategies to meet children's needs, support progress and help children to achieve their full potential.

This area for improvement has not been met and will be continued.

Previous area for improvement 2

To promote their individual learning and development, the manager and staff should provide children with a choice from a rich variety of experiences. They should create an environment which inspires children's imagination and provides children with more challenging opportunities to discover, explore, experiment and problem solve.

Consideration should be given to:

- Supporting children to lead their own learning by ensuring they have the resources to do this
- Developing opportunities which stimulate creativity and curiosity in the play environment
- Re-establish effective planning cycles to ensure all children are receiving a wide range of play and learning experiences.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which states 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 30 January 2024.

Action taken since then

Due to various circumstances, particularly the ongoing changes within the staff team, minimal progress had been made.

On the first day of the inspection, there were only limited resources available to the children, especially indoors. As it was a sunny day, staff had all the children outdoors. There were limited opportunities to extend learning around numeracy and literacy both indoors and outdoors, while the sensory area was very uninviting with minimal sensory experiences. On the second day of the inspection, there was some improvement. There were more resources, activities and experiences available to the children both indoors and outdoors. Children were generally more engaged and having fun as they consolidated their learning through play.

Children should have access to a rich choice of resources and experiences at all times which was not currently the occurring.

This area for improvement has not been met and will be continued.

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?	3 - Adequate
1.1 Nurturing care and support	4 - Good
1.3 Play and learning	3 - Adequate
How good is our setting?	3 - Adequate
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	3 - Adequate
How good is our leadership?	3 - Adequate
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	3 - Adequate
How good is our staff team?	3 - Adequate
4.3 Staff deployment	3 - Adequate

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