

Mount Esk Nursery School Day Care of Children

Dalhousie Gardens
Bonnyrigg
EH19 2LS

Telephone: 01312 714 725

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
13 June 2024

Service provided by:
Midlothian Council

Service provider number:
SP2003002602

Service no:
CS2003015999

About the service

Mount Esk Nursery School is registered to provide an early learning and childcare service to a maximum of 64 children not yet attending primary school at any one time.

The service is situated in the town of Bonnyrigg in Midlothian. The purpose-built nursery consists of a large playroom, a small sensory room, enclosed garden, toilets, nappy changing facilities, a small kitchen and two offices.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection that took place on 10 June between 08:30 and 16:00 and 11 June 2024 between 09:15 and 13:00. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate.

To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about the service. This included, previous inspection findings, registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since last inspection.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with children using the service and three of their family members
- received seven online questionnaires from families
- spoke with staff and received five online questionnaires from staff
- spoke with visiting professionals
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

We provided feedback to the manager, principal teacher and a representative from the local authority on 13 June 2024.

Key messages

- Children experienced kind, caring and warm nurturing approaches from staff, supporting them to feel important.
- A homely, calm environment provided inviting spaces and experiences for children to play, learn and develop.
- Sensitive and skilled interactions were used to expand children's play and learning.
- Children benefitted from daily access to the woodland space, this provided deep opportunities for learning in the natural environment, supporting their health and wellbeing.
- Quality assurance and self-evaluation processes enabled the service to deliver high quality care, play and learning.
- Children were supported by a strong, enthusiastic team who worked well together to get it right for children.
- Supporting staff's wellbeing, continuous learning and development was important to the service.

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?	6 - Excellent
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?

6 - Excellent

We evaluated this key question as excellent, where performance was sector leading with outstandingly high outcomes for children.

Quality Indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support

Children were very well nurtured and supported throughout their day. Building strong relationships was of great importance to the service, resulting in children experiencing warmth and nurture from staff. We observed kind and loving staff who were responsive to children's individual needs and requests. Consequently, children demonstrated increased emotional resilience and security, feeling supported and understood in their environment. This nurturing approach fostered confidence and ability to manage emotions, leading to positive social and emotional development. A child told a member of staff, "I love you". A family commented, "Staff take extra time to provide what's best, it's clear that they all care deeply for the children".

Snack time was positive, relaxed and unhurried. We observed children helping prepare snack, a child told us, "I'm helping cut the banana, I like bananas". Children were able to decide when to have their snack, demonstrating independence as they collected their name, gathered their food and poured their drinks. Overall, lunchtime was a positive experience for children. Children were able to choose when they came for lunch, meaning their play was not interrupted. Staff sat with them to facilitate conversation, encourage eating and offer praise. This approach not only promoted sociable mealtimes but it also supported children's natural routine, independence and preferences, contributing to children's overall wellbeing and confidence.

Staff recognised the strengths that families brought to the service and promoted a partnership approach. This was further complemented by various opportunities to engage with their child and staff within the service, for example, through stay and play sessions, family breakfasts and 'cupa and a chats'. This level of family engagement strengthened children and family's overall health, wellbeing and resilience.

Personal planning systems positively supported children in reaching their full potential. Strong relationships had been developed between children and families and this was central to the effectiveness of the personal planning approach. The service worked in partnership with families to ensure information gathered was used efficiently by staff. This enabled staff to respond in a timely, sensitive and compassionate manner to children's overall well-being needs. Skilled sensitive and knowledgeable staff created a safe and trusting environment to support children's well-being. They shared understanding around 'The Promise Scotland' and trauma informed practise. This was clearly demonstrated by staff who shared heartfelt stories of children's progress, building relationships and developing resilience. Family feedback was positive, a family told us, "They work with us as a team and follow our lead in how best to steer children". During a discussion, management instantaneously came up with a solution to a potential gap in a child's plan. This demonstrated a firm understanding and commitment to getting it right for every child.

Medication was stored in line with best practice guidance and emergency flow charts were in place for children who required them. We identified minor errors in some information recorded to support staff administering medication. However, we were satisfied that children's medication was administered safely because staff were trained and competent.

The service's commitment to supporting children with additional support needs was having a positive impact on their progress and development. Staff worked with families and other professionals such as, health visitors, art therapist and the local authority early years inclusion and wellbeing team, to identify strategies and next steps based on children's individual needs. Staff used individual strategies such as, song and object signifiers to support individuals' new routines and transition. A family commented, "I'm grateful for the support and links with other local services that support my child". This fostered a supportive and inclusive environment ensuring all children received the support they needed to reach their full potential.

Quality Indicator 1.3: Play and learning

Children were happy, confident and having great fun as they engaged in the outstanding range of play and learning experiences on offer. Resources and experiences reflected the children's ongoing needs and interests. Children were respected and empowered to be fully involved in their play and learning by highly skilled and attentive staff. As a result, children's choice, natural curiosity and independence was developed. A family commented, "They have lot's for the kids to do, and they get the kids out no matter the weather". Staff told us, "Our children are supported by caring enthusiastic staff who have the children's interests and learning at the heart of our practice".

Planning approaches placed children at the centre of their learning and development, this ensured children experienced challenge, breadth and depth. A balance of responsive and intentional high-quality learning provided varied, rich and developmentally appropriate experiences for all children. Detailed tracking, monitoring and excellent individual observations enabled staff to recognise and respond to what children needed in their play. Children's voice and active participation was embedded across the environment. This resulted in exceptional levels of engagement within children's play and learning.

Staff empowered children to have complete autonomy in their learning. Learning journals were a rich influence in how children shaped, contributed to and reflected on their development and past experiences. Children's successes and achievements were shared through learning journals and planning floor books. Staff innovatively captured children's voice, interests and unique character within these. Children could take the journals home and share them with their wider family. QR codes facilitated children's ownership of their play and learning. This successfully built children's confidence in digital literacy. A child said to us, "if you use your iPad, you can see my video", then proudly showed us a video of them and their friend doing a show. Several children shared their learning journals with us, confidently recalling past events and in the moment, adding to previous entries with marks and drawings.

Innovative and creative approaches were used to promote children's developing language, numeracy and literacy skills. Exceptional literacy, numeracy and mathematical provocations were threaded throughout the environment both indoors and out. Visual supports were used to support children's understanding and language development. The team celebrated children's individual learning. For example, children had created their own labels for snack, some were photos, some typed and others had written their own name. Consequently, children were supported to achieve their potential in a way that was right for them.

Children's development and learning was deepened by excellent connections to their own and wider communities. Children confidently shared how they used 'google maps' while out in the community to identify landmarks and guide them to their home. These extended opportunities enriched children's experience, supporting them to achieve their potential.

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

Children and families experienced a warm inclusive and welcoming environment resulting in a strong sense of belonging. Spaces created were comfortable, cosy and homely, with ample fresh air from open doors and natural light through low-level windows. The variety of rugs and cushions made the floor inviting for play and rest, while the use of drapes, canopies and soft lighting created intimate, cosy areas within the larger space. This thoughtfully designed environment contributed to children's emotional well-being and sense of security, promoting positive outcomes.

Indoor and outdoor environments were sensitively constructed offering children consistent opportunities to develop and thrive. Staff talked positively about recent changes to the indoor environment as one large play space had been created from two existing playrooms. This enabled children to play with their siblings and friendships to blossom. Changes to the environment increased children's access to a wider variety of play experiences and provided more opportunities for children to safely be alone. For instance, the green room was used for children to retreat to if they wanted or needed quiet time. A large home area provided rich opportunities for children's role play and imagination. Children were observed in the garden deeply engaged in their play whilst the environment promoted motor skills, curiosity and creativity. Children had ownership and influence of their environment. A child told us how their parents had too many plants so brought some into nursery, they helped plant them in the nursery garden. This meant children benefitted from rich child-led play and learning because of the spaces created.

Children benefitted from daily access to the woods where they experienced appropriate challenge in nature. A staff member told us they delivered a Forest School presentation with the wider team to share their learning and promote good practice. During our visit, we observed children painting on a sheet with mud using utensils made of sticks and leaves. Some children were relaxing in hammocks and playing on the log swings, while others were engaged in a bug hunt. Family commented, "The forest area outdoor is just fantastic, offering loads of play and learning opportunities". As a result, children experienced risky play improving confidence and resilience while fostering creativity, physical and mental well-being, and encouraging a deeper connection with nature.

The setting was safe, secure and well maintained. The secure entrance and exit maintained children's safety. A staff member was assigned to the door at drop off and pick up times meaning all children and families were safely welcomed into the setting. Daily procedures were in place to identify and remove risks. This meant broken and damaged equipment, resources and furniture, were removed to ensure children's safety. We discussed with management the low-level gate in the woodland space and our SIMOA campaign. They informed us children were part of ongoing risk assessing. They were familiar with the environment and staff had trust in the children and they were extra vigilant of this through their ongoing risk assessments. This approach ensured children's safety.

Good infection prevention and control practices were in place, children were familiar with handwashing routines and staff washed their hands throughout the day. Surfaces and areas such as, the kitchen, toilets and nappy changing were clean and well maintained with appropriate storage in place. We discussed with management the nappy changing facilities and asked them to review their infection prevention and control measures. The manager was receptive and proactive to this feedback and immediately updated the current risk assessment to ensure it was maintaining robust infection prevention and control practices.

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 shared vision and values of the service positively informed staff practice. The strong ethos of empathy, inclusion and building of relationships successfully created a caring, loving and trusting environment. Staff were ambitious advocates of children's rights and were driven by providing the best possible outcomes for all. This led to continuous improvement to enhance the delivery of high-quality practice.

Children and families were meaningfully involved and influenced change through genuine partnership. Monthly newsletters and ongoing parental involvement ensured families were kept up to date and informed of changes. Family involvement included, an open evening to share 'learning together', fundraising for outdoor clothing and supporting with gardening tasks. Meaningful engagement ensured family feedback was captured and actions taken forward. Recent feedback to the service from families around the Seesaw app pointed to families wanting a more streamlined and effective approach to information sharing. Management facilitated space and time for staff to reflect on the purpose of Seesaw and plan actions moving forward. This was captured online and recorded on the improvement action plan. This demonstrated that family feedback influenced continuous improvement.

A quality assurance calendar was in place. However, we found quality assurance processes did not pick up on some of our findings. For example, gaps in medication documents, personal plan reviews, and some accidents and incidents were unsigned by families. The service was receptive to our feedback, we were reassured these were oversights and more robust processes will be put in place to ensure effective quality assurance.

Continuous improvement and self-evaluation were embedded within the service. Strong leadership supported staff to have high aspirations and confidence in their capacity to support families reach their full potential. This meant that high quality play, learning and engagement was at the heart of service delivery. Family feedback included, "Amazing Head Teachers and seniors who go out there way to seek the correct professionals involved and strive to get it right for my child".

Leaders created conditions where all people felt confident to initiate well-informed change and share responsibility for the process. Staff had shared ownership of implementing change and evaluating improvements. Continuous improvements were captured within highly effective action plans which all staff were meaningfully involved in developing and contributing to. This ensured a shared vision to influence change within a forward-thinking team. As a result, children experienced improved outcomes through high quality care, play and learning which was based on relevant research, theory and best practice. A family told us, "Management are the warmest, kindest and knowledgeable people you could meet at a nursery".

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

Effective deployment of the skilled staff team ensured high quality outcomes for children. Staff told us they felt supported by each other and the management team. Staff skills and knowledge complimented one another, demonstrating a committed staff team who knew children well and were passionate about providing high quality care and support. However, while the lunchtime experience was generally positive, the interactions from lunch cover staff were not in alignment with the service ethos. The staff shared that they were committed to further developing this to ensure children consistently benefitted from high quality, nurturing interactions that maximised their well-being.

Strong team partnerships were observed as staff communicated very well with their colleagues. Staff were at ease with children moving between indoors and out with no impact on children's freedom of movement. They used google chat to communicate between the larger spaces to support and promote children's wellbeing and safety. Consequently, children experienced stability, effective supervision and quality engagement from staff who worked well together.

The service had regular supply staff who were familiar with the service. We spoke with a member of staff who was on supply, they told us, "I Love it here, everyone is so lovely and supportive". This ensured continuity and consistency for children and their families.

Leadership at all levels provided opportunities for practitioners to use their skills and knowledge to provide innovate learning spaces, experiences and interactions. Up to date best practice guidance significantly contributed to positive outcomes for all children. Staff were skilled in questioning and extending thinking, encouraging children to problem solve, take and manage risks while contributing to depth in learning. This meant children were challenged in their daily play and learning experiences.

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?	6 - Excellent
1.1 Nurturing care and support	6 - Excellent
1.3 Play and learning	6 - Excellent
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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Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

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