

Lothian Autistic Society in West Lothian Day Care of Children

Connolly School Campus
Hopefield Road
Blackburn
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Telephone: 01316 613 834

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
2 August 2024

Service provided by:
Lothian Autistic Society

Service provider number:
SP2003002777

Service no:
CS2003011786

About the service

Lothian Autistic Society West Lothian is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 30 children at any one time aged five years to 18 years. Staffing ratios will be set to meet the needs of the children attending. The manager is also the manager of Lothian Autistic Society Support Services (CS2017353607) and Lothian Autistic Society Edinburgh Daycare (CS2007156209).

The service is delivered from Connolly School Campus in Blackburn, West Lothian. Children use allocated spaces within the school and have access to the secure outdoor area. The service is close to local bus routes and amenities such as shops and parks.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection starting on Wednesday 31 July 2024 between 09:40 to 10:10. The service was going on a planned outing at this time and so we returned from 13:45 to 15:30. We completed the inspection on Thursday 01 August 2024 between the hours of 09:40 and 15:50. One inspector from the Care Inspectorate carried out this inspection.

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

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- observed children using the service and spoke with three parents
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice and daily routines
- reviewed documents relating to children's care and the management of the service.

We gave feedback to the manager by videocall on Friday 02 August 2024.

Key messages

Children were cared for with warmth and respect by staff who were committed to knowing their individual needs and preferences.

Children experienced a variety of play and life-skill activities which enabled them to follow their interests and practise new skills in a safe place.

The setting was highly suited to children's needs and provided them with freedom to move around safely and independently.

Effective staffing provided continuity of care for children, with familiar and trusted relationships being established.

Management and the team strived to continuously improve the service for 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?	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

Children were nurtured throughout their daily experiences by staff they had built positive relationships with. Staff tuned into individual needs through reading personal plan information, observing and chatting with the child. This helped staff to know children's cues and communication styles. As a result, children got the best from their time in the service very quickly. Children were supported through daily transitions sensitively and respectfully. For example, the use of now and next cards helped children to be prepared for the next part of their day, such as lunchtime. Personal care was carried out discreetly to protect children's dignity. An accessible toilet was mostly used to protect their privacy.

Mealtimes were relaxed, sociable and safe. Everyone ate together around tables in the large kitchen. This was flexible and children could choose to be elsewhere, which suited their needs and preferences better. To develop mealtimes further, the service will explore how to balance individual health needs with ensuring children feel included with their peers.

Children's individual wellbeing benefited from the effective use of personal planning. Strong partnerships with parents and referring agencies meant that relevant information about children could be shared prior to them attending the service. This detailed information about needs, preferences and medication kept staff informed and up to date. This helped them to provide continuity of care between home, school and the service. Staff knew children well and were committed to learning more about them in each session. New information was captured in handover notes and shared with each other for consistency. As a result, children's health, welfare and safety needs were met.

Overall, children were respected as individuals, being enabled where necessary and empowered in their independent self-care, decision-making and problem-solving. For example, permissions were sought, choices were offered and children's opinions asked for. As a result, children felt heard and in control of their own care. Parents told us their children were happy going in and coming out, with one child communicating that he wanted to be at the service even when not scheduled to be there.

Quality indicator 1.3: Play and learning

Children had fun as they experienced quality play, learning and development opportunities. A combination of planned activities and free play offered choice and variety, but also structure for those who benefited from it. Visiting organisations offered access to messy play, small animals and music activities, while local and further afield visits offered new experiences. These were planned and provided with all children's needs and preferences in mind to ensure a positive experience.

Overall, children were engaged, settled and free to explore and use their environment and resources as they wished. Play spaces were set up to support choices from a range of play types from role play and small world to construction and active play. Staff were aware of children's need for repetitive behaviours as part of their learning or support strategies, so play was never interrupted. Staff were also mindful in their practice and were guided by the child's pace. For example, looking at the box rather than playing the game in the

box. Staff supported children's learning by commentating on their activities and asking open questions where appropriate. This encouraged recall of information, modelled vocabulary and supported children's thinking skills.

A strength of the service was the focus on supporting children with life skills. Daily tasks such as self-care, social skills and connecting with their local community were learned and practised. Children were supported to assess and manage risk where relevant, such as road safety and personal boundaries. A parent said, "They go out and about, getting experience in life". Such rich experiences helped to enhance children's confidence and sense of achievement.

Children's interests were used to plan activities and provide resources. For example, making slime, playing with dinosaurs and exploring sensory materials. In addition, children were supported to reflect on activities to help inform future plans. For example, children giving verbal feedback as well as staff monitoring engagement levels to determine enjoyment. Next steps were starting to be set for children based on their interests and developmental needs. This meant that children could progress and celebrate their achievements.

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 quality facilities

The setting was comfortable and homely. Children looked relaxed and familiar with the space as they moved around confidently. They had places to store their belongings and places to rest or be active. The large kitchen provided a home from home mealtime experience as children ate together at the tables. The setting was a pleasant place to be with natural light, ventilation and relaxed décor. Children were given a strong sense that their comfort and safety mattered.

Children were safe and secure in a well-maintained environment. Features were in place to ensure children's safety such as key pad doors and a secure outside area. This allowed children freedom of movement and autonomy regarding where they wanted to be. Children's safety was further enhanced through staff knowledge of reducing and managing risks. Infection prevention and control measures were in place to reduce the risk of infection spread. For example, effective handwashing and personal protective equipment for personal care. A parent said, "I feel really safe leaving him here and know he will be happy".

The environment provided children with developmentally appropriate spaces. A variety of areas such as corridors and classrooms were in use for children to move freely around in and choose where to be. Each space offered children something different. For example, a quiet room with books, an arts and crafts area, free play and outdoor play. Children had access to a range of stage appropriate resources to explore and be creative with. Staff also had access to further resources to use if appropriate for a more structured experience. Pictures and symbols informed children of what was available and where so they could independently choose. Resources reflected children's interests and were displayed attractively to invite them into play.

The outdoors was freely accessible throughout the session. It was a large, secure, multi-use space allowing for a variety of experiences. For example, children could join in with sensory trays, group games and the use of a fire pit. Outdoor experiences offered children opportunities to practice skills and consider risk in a safe

place. Children frequently used the local community for new and varied experiences. The local community provided green spaces, walks and local amenities such as shops and the library.

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 improvements are led well

Children and families benefited from a service which was led by experienced and committed management. A clear overview of the staff and children attending, meant that their needs were at the heart of decisions and plans. The manager understood the needs of the setting and worked with the landlord to ensure terms of the let were adhered to. This ensured a consistent venue for children which was suitable for their needs.

The service was committed to providing a fun and tailor-made service for each child. This reflected the service vision and values of inclusion, empowerment and personal growth. A parent said, "This is a lifeline for our family". The allocation of days was an important factor in this to ensure a mix of children, age and stage and support level. This demonstrated a child-led and inclusive approach. The child's voice was woven into self-evaluation and planning processes as staff observed them, sought their feedback and took action.

The service was committed to involving parents through keeping them informed and seeking their feedback. Parents we spoke with confirmed they were given information before the holiday service so they could prepare their child in advance. They also confirmed their involvement in creating personal plans. The service planned to continue trialling new ways to seek feedback and involve parents in the life of the service to aid improvements.

Effective quality assurance and self evaluation processes resulted in improvements to the quality of the service. For example, training had upskilled staff and increased confidence in keeping themselves and children safe. As a result incidents had reduced and could be de-escalated quickly. Another example was enhancing the focus on children's outcomes in different aspects of the service and advocating these with partner agencies. Improvement planning was structured and captured in a working document so all staff were involved in improving outcomes for families.

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

Children's needs were effectively met as management understood the importance of appropriate staffing levels and deployment. A core staff team provided familiar relationships and consistent care for children. Ratios were mostly one-to-one to ensure all children could engage fully in what the service had to offer. This was monitored closely on a daily basis and altered if necessary. Staff views were sought and respected on this, giving a sense of shared leadership, as well as enhanced staff wellbeing.

The peripatetic manager had delegated the operational management to two lead staff. These staff were experienced, knowledgeable and committed to getting it right for each child. This was demonstrated by the

professional learning undertaken and its use to benefit children. They moved around the service in an unobtrusive way and discreetly supported when needed. For example, staff were empowered by the lead staff offering support as opposed to just giving it. As a result children and staff felt safe due to their calm and measured approach. This reflected the overall ethos of the service where everyone felt nurtured and enabled.

The team worked together to ensure their own wellbeing and the children's. They were responsive to each others needs and requests for support. This cohesive approach meant that staff's own needs were prioritised and met to ensure they were ready and able to support the children. Parents we spoke with all agreed with the comment, "The staff are amazing".

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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