

Helmsdale Primary School Nursery Day Care of Children

Helmsdale Primary School
Old Caithness Road
Helmsdale
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Telephone: 01431 821 244

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
21 June 2024

Service provided by:
Highland Council

Service provider number:
SP2003001693

Service no:
CS2003017214

About the service

Helmsdale Primary School Nursery is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 20 children, from the age of three years to those not yet attending primary school. The nursery is operated by The Highland Council. The head teacher manages the nursery. The nursery operates term-time only.

The nursery is located in a classroom within Helmsdale Primary School in Sutherland. The nursery premises consists of a dedicated playroom with kitchen area, nearby toilets and changing room. Cloakroom facilities are situated outside the nursery playroom. There is also an enclosed outdoor play area within the school grounds.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 19 June 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 seven children using the service
- reviewed six online questionnaires from parents and carers
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Children were cared for by staff who were warm, compassionate and nurturing.
- Play experiences across the nursery supported the development of children's language, literacy and numeracy skills.
- Children benefitted from a good range of open-ended, natural child-centred resources, enabling them to explore their creativity, imagination and problem-solving skills.
- There was no direct access to the outdoor space from the indoor playroom, restricting choice in children's play experiences.
- Children benefitted from a manager and staff team who were committed to continuous improvement.
- Staffing levels did not consistently allow children to lead their play and learning.

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?	4 - Good
How good is our setting?	4 - Good
How good is our leadership?	4 - Good
How good is our staff team?	4 - Good

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

How good is our care, play and learning?

4 - Good

We made an evaluation of good, for this key question. As several important strengths taken together clearly outweighed areas for improvement. Whilst some improvements were needed, the strengths identified had a significant positive impact on children's experiences.

Quality Indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support

Children benefitted from a happy, caring and committed staff team who were passionate about providing high quality care and support. All staff modelled respectful and caring behaviours which were reflected in how the children interacted with staff and with each other. As a result, children felt loved and valued by the people who cared for them.

Children's individual wellbeing was effectively supported through personal planning. Staff knew children very well and spoke knowledgeably about children's differing needs. Overall Information recorded in children's personal plans reflected the care and support staff provided which contributed to continuity and consistency in care.

Where children needed additional care and support, effective procedures for sharing information with other professionals were in place. Staff worked proactively with children, families and other professionals to identify appropriate strategies based on individual needs and prior learning. This ensured that all children were getting the support they needed to reach their full potential.

High quality snack and lunchtime experiences promoted opportunities for children to develop independence and skills for life. For example, children poured their own milk, prepared and served their own snack and cleared away their dishes. The snack environment promoted a sociable, nurturing experience. The addition of a tablecloth, flowers, real crockery and cutlery as well as placemats, supported a homely and relaxed atmosphere. At snack and lunchtimes, staff sat with children which provided opportunities to promote close attachments and develop language skills.

Children benefitted from their families being warmly welcomed into the service. They were enabled to support their children to settle in and participate in stay and play sessions. Establishing good working relationship with parents was important to the staff. There was daily communication with families at drop off and collection time as well as online updates. Most parents felt communication was effective. Meaningful relationships had been formed with most families who told us they felt included in the nursery community. This holistic approach resulted in children that were happy and learning, and most families felt valued and included. One parent commented, "The staff are very welcoming and encourage parents to pop their heads in the nursery setting to let children show them what they've been doing. There are lots of graphics and info about what's been going on within the nursery setting."

Quality Indicator 1.3: Play and learning

Children were happy, confident and enjoying their time with their friends and staff. We saw some good examples of children leading their play and learning experiences both indoors and outdoors. During this time children were absorbed in their play and having fun. However, on occasions, due to the building having no direct access to the outdoor area, children were unable to make choices around where they played.

Play experiences across the nursery supported the development of children's language, literacy and numeracy skills. Children were able to practice and develop their emerging writing skills through painting, cutting, gluing and mark making across the indoor and outdoor spaces. Examples of children's mark making were valued, displayed within the service and used to support aspects of the day-to-day routine such as, planning learning.

Children were being supported to widen their skills and consolidate their learning through play. Staff used skilled interactions to support children's learning and development. They carefully observed play and timed interactions to create a balance of opportunities which allowed children to investigate for themselves. While sharing a story together, staff posed questions which encouraged further inquiry such as, "I wonder if you can find something in the nursery garden that is the same colour as the monster in this story?". Staff also introduced new language in play referring to past events and resources in the playroom. They used mathematical language when children were building large and small structures such as, taller and longer, more or less. As a result, children were developing a wide range of lifelong skills.

Children were offered good experiences to be imaginative and creative in their explorative play and investigative learning. During these experiences staff used effective questions, encouraging children to explore, test and develop ideas. For example, in the garden, children enjoyed exploring in the mud kitchen, with real life resources and using fresh mint they had grown in the garden. This also encouraged the development of gross motor skills and hand eye co-ordination.

Children's play and learning was enhanced through strong connections to the local community. This included, walks, trips to the park and a recent visit to the local fire station. These experiences stimulated children's interests and curiosities.

Planning approaches within the nursery were child centred and responsive to the children's interests. Children's words, pictures and ideas were captured within a "road map" on a planning wall which demonstrated their involvement in the planning process.

Children's progress and development was recorded through learning journals and developmental overviews. Some observations identified children's developing knowledge, skills and understanding. However, some were descriptive and next steps were not consistently identified and followed up. The staff and manager were aware of this and recognised this is an area for continued development.

How good is our setting?

4 - Good

We made an evaluation of good, for this key question. As several important strengths taken together clearly outweighed areas for improvement. Whilst some improvements were needed, the strengths identified had a significant positive impact on children's experiences.

Quality Indicator 2.2: Children experience high quality facilities

The playroom and outdoor garden space were well thought out to maximise children's play and learning experiences. Children benefitted from a good range of open-ended, natural child-centred resources, enabling them to explore their creativity, imagination and problem-solving skills. This contributed to the fun they had while playing and learning.

The indoor playroom was decorated in neutral colours which promoted a natural, calm environment. This fostered a welcoming atmosphere for the children. The addition of soft furnishings, lamps and plants softened the environment, creating a homely feel.

Children's requests to play indoors or outdoors could not always be accommodated, as there was no direct access to the outdoor space from the indoor playroom. To access outdoors children had to be accompanied by staff from the school building, across a playground to a secure outdoor play area. This meant children's choice in play experiences was restricted.

The outdoor space supported children to develop their gross and fine motor skills. Children played with a variety of large loose parts including, tyres, cable drums and plastic pipes. They made good use of these items to create obstacle courses and challenge themselves. Staff supported children well during these experiences, helping them to consider how to keep themselves safe when taking risks and encouraged them to work collaboratively with their peers. Children also had fun playing in water and digging in the mud. They were very excited to show us fruit and herbs they had grown in the garden. This gave children a sense of responsibility and encouraged good discussions with staff. Consequently, early language and social skills were being developed.

Children's safety was promoted when they played outdoors. The setting was secure, with a clear perimeter fence. Staff were aware of where they needed to position themselves to ensure they had good vision of children playing. This contributed to children being safe as they played outdoors. Staff worked well together to ensure children were accounted for at all times, undertaking regular counts as children arrived and left the setting.

How good is our leadership?

4 - Good

We made an evaluation of good, for this key question. As several important strengths taken together clearly outweighed areas for improvement. Whilst some improvements were needed, the strengths identified had a significant positive impact on children's experiences.

Quality Indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well

Children and families benefitted from a committed manager and staff team. This created a happy and welcoming ethos in the service promoting a positive atmosphere for children to play and learn. The positive ethos meant staff were proactive in taking shared responsibility for change and improvement. This meant children received care and support from a staff team who were motivated and responsive to meeting their needs.

Children and families were regularly consulted and their views gathered. Most parents strongly agreed they are involved in a meaningful way to help develop the setting. This gave a strong message that their views mattered. Parents comments included, "I always give my ideas and feedback, and so does my child." and "Staff always ask for ideas and views and there is a book for suggestions in the nursery."

A realistic improvement plan was driving forward nursery developments. Priorities were outcome focussed with realistic targets which improved outcomes for children. Ongoing monitoring and reviewing of the priorities meant the manager and staff had a clear overview on their progress. This meant children benefitted from a service that continued to improve.

The service had made links with professionals and other childcare establishments to share good practice. These opportunities had been used well to evaluate the service and improve opportunities available for children and their families.

The manager and staff fully engaged in the inspection process and appreciated the guidance and suggestions offered by the inspectors. This demonstrated their commitment and motivation to make improvements to ensure positive outcomes for children.

How good is our staff team?

4 - Good

We made an evaluation of good, for this key question. As several important strengths taken together clearly outweighed areas for improvement. Whilst some improvements were needed, the strengths identified had a significant positive impact on children's experiences.

Quality Indicator 4.3: Staff deployment

Children were cared for by staff who were warm, compassionate and nurturing. Staff provided individualised support by effectively engaging with children throughout the inspection. Staff demonstrated an awareness of when and how to effectively intervene, picking up on cues to support children's wellbeing and extend their play experiences. This resulted in children who felt respected within the service. Parents were complimentary of the staff team, comments included, "Staff treat children like family and are so caring and kind." and "The staff are friendly and approachable for any query or situation that may arise with my child. I feel very comfortable with them." and "The staff are very professional; I feel that I'm leaving my child in good hands."

Children were supported by motivated and enthusiastic staff who were committed to their role. Staff shared a common vision and worked hard to achieve good quality play and learning for children. They were supportive of each other and their differing skills, knowledge and experience complimented one another. This resulted in good quality experiences for children. They communicated well with each other and in a respectful manner to ensure children's needs were met consistently across the session. This contributed to children being respected and created a positive team ethos within the service.

Staffing levels did not consistently allow children to lead their play and learning. For example, the number of staff working in the setting meant children could not move freely between the indoor and outdoor environment. This meant staff could not always meet children's individual play choices. The staff and manager were aware of this and the manager agreed to follow this up with the provider to review staffing levels in the setting.

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?	4 - Good
1.1 Nurturing care and support	5 - Very Good
1.3 Play and learning	4 - Good
How good is our setting?	4 - Good
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	4 - Good
How good is our leadership?	4 - Good
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	4 - Good
How good is our staff team?	4 - Good
4.3 Staff deployment	4 - Good

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