

Victoria After School Club Day Care of Children

Victoria Primary School
2 Windrush Drive
Edinburgh
EH6 4TN

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
13 September 2024

Service provided by:
Victoria After School Club

Service provider number:
SP2003013659

Service no:
CS2010238362

About the service

Victoria After School Club is registered to provide an after school and holiday care service to a maximum of 50 children at any one time of primary school age.

The service is delivered from Victoria Primary School in the Newhaven district of Edinburgh. The service has the use of the school dining hall, toilets, a large playground and a separate office and storage space just off the dining hall. They also have use of the school gym hall when this is not being used by active schools. The service offers holiday club provision during school holidays.

The service is located near to parks, shops and amenities and has good transport links. It has strong links with the local community and offers forest school activities and experiences for children.

The manager is also the registered manager for Trinity After School Club.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Monday 9 September 2024. We returned on Tuesday 10 September 2024 to complete the inspection. 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:

- spent time with and spoke to children using the service
- spoke with family members both face to face and received feedback from an online form from 41 families
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents relating to the care and support of children and the management of the service.

Key messages

Children were cared for by knowledgeable, reflective staff with genuine compassion and a firm focus on raising children's wellbeing through nurturing, warm and supportive interactions.

Children were given a broad range of excellent, innovative opportunities both within the club and through the use of the community to develop their play and learning resulting in high levels of personal achievement.

Planned experiences and exciting, unique opportunities were providing children with rich, authentic play and learning experiences which enhanced their own sense of wellbeing by giving back to their communities.

Children were cared for in a safe environment which constantly evolved in accordance with their needs and interests.

Strong, innovative leadership and robust quality assurance processes resulted in a culture of continuous improvement which was having a positive impact to outcomes for children within and beyond 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?	5 - Very Good
How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
How good is our leadership?	6 - Excellent
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 different parts of this key question as very good and excellent, with an overall grade of very good where significant strengths in aspects of the care provided supported positive outcomes for children.

Quality indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support

Children were very nurtured and supported throughout their daily experiences by high quality interactions and consistently responsive routines. Real expressions of kindness, enquiry and respect between staff and children in the service provided a safe, interesting and compassionate place for children to be. One family highlighted that the staff were, "really friendly and genuinely care for the children attending, they always go over and above with any questions or requests, and are all very approachable and know my child well." Children were supported to be independent and have fun because the service had developed strong connections and meaningful relationships with families. This responsive approach respected children and family's views and promoted continuity of care. One family member told us, "The staff take the time to get to know the children, they can tell if something is bothering them and take the time to find out what's wrong and then let me know what's been going on. The staff are not only caring about my child who attends after school club but take the time to know the whole family." Children's sense of comfort and security was enhanced by this highly collaborative approach where families trusted the service to act in the best interests of their child.

Snack times were safe and calm experiences allowing children to socialise with their peers and eat at their own pace. Staff's enabling approach empowered children to make choices about what and when to eat. Preparing, self-serving and clearing away their own snack items provided opportunities to build life-long skills and a sense of achievement. For example, independently pouring, spreading, cutting fruit and vegetables and washing their own dishes. Children were also involved in planning snack in advance and families were invited in for taster sessions provided by the children. This collaborative approach to children's care allowed for the building of strong emotional connections and bonds and provided a true sense of belonging.

Children's individual wellbeing benefitted from the effective use of personal planning. The process of this was kept under constant review by the staff team so they could continue to reflect on up-to-date guidance and ways of planning and preparing for children's outcomes to be maximised. The service maintained good relationships with the school to share in the support of each child and attended child planning meetings to promote consistency of care across services. Staff knew children very well and had very good insight into their family lives. One family told us they felt a strength was the, "great communication" they had with them, and how this reassured them that, "I know that my child is safe and cared for here. They take my son's interests into account and have formed wonderful relationships with him." These close bonds enabled collaborative planning so that children's care and support was both relevant and consistent, for example, in supporting children with toileting, or in respecting and developing their varying communication styles. Children's progress was monitored closely to ensure support strategies continued to be effective, and the staff team used national wellbeing indicators to celebrate children's achievements as well as plan for next steps. One family told us, "The staff are excellent and work really well together as a team. They know my daughter really well and tailor activities to suit her interests perfectly." Another told us, "(my child) learned how to ride a bike at Victoria Afterschool Club with encouragement from the staff and their peers."

Quality indicator 1.3: Play and learning

Planning approaches were child centred and responsive to children's interests and life experiences. Children's ideas and thoughts were valued in planning through the use of a 'wishing tree' which was responded to by staff weekly. This meant children chose experiences and resources to suit their own interests, such as making slime, clay modelling, or the 'mud café' outdoors in the mud kitchen. Children became absorbed in play, developing their imagination and being curious as they chatted warmly with peers. One family told us, "There are multiple types of play which are child led allowing them to focus based on their preferences. The team are so supportive to the children's needs."

A particular strength of the service was how they had promoted children's development and learning through outstanding, innovative links made with the community. Children were taking part in a variety of authentic opportunities for learning which enhanced their developing curiosity and social and emotional skills such as empathy, humanity and compassion. For example, children were developing a strong sense of responsibility for their local area and in learning for sustainability through projects with Newhaven Harbour, and the service had taken over responsibility for a local community garden that would otherwise have decayed. Children and families worked collaboratively within this garden, which is now thriving and has received awards. One particularly interesting project was the involvement of families and children in making sleeping bags out of litter and collected crisp packets, which were then sent to homeless charities. Children gained a real sense of wellbeing, warmth and achievement through having opportunities like these to support others and give back to society. Alongside these bigger innovations, the service also regularly took part in litter picks with families and provided innovative, exciting experiences for children such as the introduction of therapy dogs and BMX bikers instruction. Plans continued to evolve, with their next aim being to invite and engage children in creative expression by creating pieces of art from litter they have collected.

Happy children had fun as they experienced outstanding play, learning and development opportunities. They moved freely around spaces, making choices, negotiating in play and experimenting with resources. They had true ownership of the space, time to immerse themselves in experiences and take forward their ideas. Children felt respected and safe because staff were facilitating and compassionate in their interactions with them. Staff used effective listening and questions with children. This meant children were supported and confident to stretch their learning and understanding of a variety of concepts linked to their interests.

High quality observations allowed staff to build a picture of children's interests and needs and used this to plan individualised experiences and spaces. Families identified individualised play and learning opportunities such as, "science experiments are encouraged which my kid loves," "sensory trays are a big hit with my younger child. My older child likes the crash mats and the crafting table," and "my child loves the gym mats - they have been learning new moves and practicing cartwheels." This highly responsive approach, with a focus on continuous improvement ensured the service continued to work towards children developing a broad range of lifelong learning skills and a love of learning.

Children's thinking, problem-solving and decision-making skills were encouraged and extended through the skilled interactions of staff. For example, supporting children to consider how to realise their ideas in the arts and crafts area. Children built resilience and patience as they worked to bring their creations to life. Children were equal partners in routines and practical tasks of the service such as in quality assuring the environment. They used and reinforced their literacy and critical thinking skills as they read and checked off spaces and experiences giving them a shared responsibility for their environment.

Real life opportunities valued children's thoughts and ideas and gave them authentic and meaningful ways to add value to their space as well as play and learn. Forest school experiences gave children the opportunity to learn whittling, how to safely build fires and cook outdoors, and tie a variety of knots.

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

Very good use of the environment had created a comfortable, bright, safe and welcoming environment for children. It was furnished to a high standard, with plenty of natural light, ventilation, and free-flowing access to the outdoors. It gave a strong message to children that they mattered, as experiences, resources and spaces were linked to their interests, suggestions and ideas. This meant children could make choices about where they wanted to play and in ways that suited them. They were very engaged in experiences during inspection, and one family told us, "I know that my child is safe and cared for here. (Staff) take their interests into account and have formed wonderful relationships with them."

The environment was set up with core experiences and resources that children could choose from which provided a broad range of play opportunities. These experiences empowered and valued children's choice, enriched their imagination and creativity and inspired their curiosity.

Exciting planned experiences took place outdoors as well as indoors to motivate children's creativity and encourage fun, unique experiences. Families and children told us about how much fun they had outdoors with head torches in the winter months, as well as the forest school activities. Children also had high levels of fun and engagement through planned events and experiences. For example, in consultation with children, the service developed their own festival event, naming it 'VASConbury.' This provided children with the opportunity to design and create their own t-shirts, and take part in powder paint ball play. The experience was enhanced by decorating the playground with bunting, playing music and hiring a bubble machine. These opportunities provided children with high levels of creativity, physical play, fun and learning and showed children that their wellbeing was prioritised and highly valued in an adaptable environment.

Well functioning arrangements for the monitoring, maintenance and repair of the environment were consistently implemented and staff were clear on removing and replacing any damaged items. Children's agency was enhanced as they were empowered to take a lead in the quality assurance of the environment daily. They gave suggestions on how to improve which were listened to and acted upon.

Staff worked together to identify and remove risks to children both within the setting and outdoors across the session. Risk assessments were used daily, and the use of walkie talkies allowed staff to communicate any risks that may arise throughout the session and take action to mitigate them. These also allowed staff to communicate with each other around the whereabouts of children and to alert each other when families arrived to pick children up. These arrangements enabled children to have full choice about where they played and supported interest led, fun experiences whilst keeping them safe.

Staff were well trained on infection prevention and control, and there were consistent approaches to protect children from the spread of infection, such as handwashing and spot check cleaning throughout the session. We advised handwashing after snacks as well as before to strengthen these procedures further.

How good is our leadership?**6 - Excellent**

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

Quality indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are well led

Children's outcomes were consistently high quality because everyone involved understood and valued the ethos of the service. This was due to a collective vision which reflected the aspirations of children, staff, families, and the wider community. Staff were empowered to initiate well informed change and took collective responsibility for the development of the service. This was possible because a culture had been created and nourished where staff felt valued and heard. One staff member said, "The manager is very motivational and encouraging." This resulted in children's needs being met and planned for because daily practice reflected their shared values. These were around wellbeing, high quality play to create a "culture of learning", partnership with families, and inclusion.

Children and family's views were actively sought and acted upon to inform the development of the service. One told us, "The club have supported my child and myself for the last seven years. It has felt like a partnership in the care of my child." The service used families feedback effectively which made them feel like partners in the service. For example, some families had suggested the environment could be improved by providing cosier, quieter areas to relax. A variety of tents, soft furnishings, blankets and bean bags had been provided. The team were passionate and proactive and continued to reflect with children on ways of enhancing this moving forwards. One family told us they felt, "...the culture is respectful, caring and inclusive...the information and collaboration with parents is fantastic! We feel so engaged and informed. It's a perfect balance."

Staff were passionate and enabled to deliver excellent support to individual needs and choices through robust, mindful and evolving self-evaluation. The clear development plan was broken down into smaller planning cycles which allowed staff to manage and organise well-paced change. The team regularly reflected on the plans to ensure success and sustained improvements. For example, staff were working towards clearer targets and supports required to monitor individual children's progress and achievements through the ongoing evaluation of children's personal planning. The service used best practice documents such as the Care Inspectorate practice notes to reflect on and plan improvements such as the snack experience. The impact of this had resulted in calm, nurturing routines and rich opportunities for learning. Staff's understanding and high motivation for making improvements ensured any change was valuable, relevant and sustained because the whole team were fully involved in planning and preparing for it.

Outstanding leadership and distributed responsibility inspired staff to have high aspirations for children to reach their full potential. The team worked with intention and purpose through an aspirational vision for the service, the local community and for the out of school sector more generally. The manager had committed time to sharing their excellent practice, with a vision to help and support others to be high quality childcare providers. For example, they had collaborated with external agencies to secure funding to develop a programme to support and develop leadership capacity across the city. One service had avoided closure as a result of long-term support and advice given by the manager. This meant a whole community had retained a valued service to meet a variety of children's and family's needs. The calming, nurturing, rich environment where children were absorbed in play in ways that suited them was a direct impact of the outstanding shared leadership.

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

The importance of ensuring appropriate staffing during the session was recognised by all as essential to the wellbeing of children in the service. The manager had taken the decision to cap numbers at a lower level to reflect and enable them to work in harmony with the vision, values and aims of enhanced wellbeing and the building of strong relationships.

Children were safe, happy and their experiences across the session were maximised because effective use was made of the differing experience, skills and knowledge of the staff group. All members of staff had a qualification in childcare, were highly reflective, and were able to discuss elements of high level practice or demonstrate it in practice. This meant children were fully supported by knowledgeable staff and engaged in their play. One family told us, "The staff are excellent and work really well together as a team. They know my child really well and tailor activities to suit their interests perfectly."

Both staff and parents felt there was always staff to provide excellent opportunities for children and importantly, that they were safe. Staff told us, "There is always ample number of adults in rooms in use for maximum supervision. If any adult is ever off work, there is always someone to cover." Families commented, "There is always enough adults at each activity to foster play and imagination within activities."

Robust arrangements were in place across the day to ensure positive transitions and communication with families. For example, staff were always available during busier times such as snack times, and arrangements were in place to collect one child five minutes early by a member of staff to ease their transition between school and the service. These were smooth and planned for, and staff and children all worked around clear, embedded routines. At pick up times, parents were always given time and often took up opportunities in a separate space to discuss successes, supports or improvements, or to have an informal chat. Arrangements for absence were well managed. Staff were motivated, happy, and well supported should they need any time off for their own needs. This meant the staff team were fresh and ready and passionate about supporting children around their needs and interests.

Staff communicated very well during the session if something took them away from a task, for example when they met with parents, or supported other children. They used walkie talkies to communicate the whereabouts of children or to alert staff outside when parents and carers arrived to pick them up. Staff worked efficiently together during the day, and engaged in informal reflections on wellbeing, play and learning which resulted in ongoing 'in the moment' improvements. Staff had different areas of responsibility over the rota which allowed for fresh ideas in planning. All staff commented on a strong team bond.

There was a clear process of induction, buddying and mentoring which enhanced staff confidence because of the ongoing peer support and reflection. In comments from families regarding the staff team, they told us, "I just can't speak highly enough of the manager and the team. They enrich our lives and our kids absolutely LOVE it there. We are very grateful and realise how lucky we are to have them!"

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	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?	6 - Excellent
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	6 - Excellent
How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good
4.3 Staff deployment	5 - Very Good

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