

St. Thomas' Primary School Nursery Class Day Care of Children

Caledonian Road
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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
8 October 2024

Service provided by:
North Lanarkshire Council

Service provider number:
SP2003000237

Service no:
CS2012307359

About the service

St Thomas Primary School Nursery Class is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 55 children, at any one time aged from two years to those not yet attending primary school, of whom no more than 15 are under three years.

Care is provided from two playrooms within St Thomas Primary School. Each playroom has direct access to a secure garden. The service is located in a residential area, close to the town centre of Wishaw.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 7 and 8 October 2024 between 10:00 and 16:00. Feedback was provided to the manager and a representative of the local authority on 8 October 2024. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors 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 children using the service and 12 of their family members.
- Spoke with staff and management.
- Observed practice and daily life.
- Reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Children were happy, settled and confident in the setting.
- Staff interactions were kind, warm and nurturing, helping children feel loved, safe and secure.
- Children's personal plans should be further developed with a focus on detailed support strategies.
- Staff knew children well and had formed positive relationships with children and their families.
- Outdoor spaces provided opportunities for exploring, being creative, assessing risk during play and developing children's imagination.
- Management and staff had a clear vision for the development of the service and were passionate and committed to drive forward improvement.
- Quality assurance processes should be further developed to support continuous improvement in the service.
- To ensure positive outcomes for children management should monitor and review the deployment of staff over key times.

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 evaluated this key question as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support

Children were happy, settled and confident in the environment. Staff supported children with kind, caring and unhurried interactions, which helped them feel safe and secure. Parents commented positively about the staff caring for their child. Parents told us "staff treat [children] well and they feel cared for and secure", "most of the staff are friendly and welcoming" and "I like that [staff] are so friendly, they truly care about our [children]."

Staff knew children well and personal plans were in place for all children. However, consistency in this approach was needed, as not all plans had the same level of detail. We asked the service to ensure that personal plans contained strategies to support individual learning and development. The service were in the progress of implementing a new 'all about me' format. We discussed methods to ensure an inclusive approach when gathering information. The service agreed with approaches identified.

Most parents told us they were involved in developing children's personal plans, commenting "I am fully involved in my child's learning plan, have regular updates and meetings. When targets are set I get to discuss and review them and if required the staff are willing to adapt them." However, some parents felt that communication and involvement around their child's personal plans and progress could be better. One parent told us they had "no say on learning targets, only told at parents meeting and no learning tracked on journal to show [my child's] met target or work towards it". We discussed this with the manager to help ensure approaches were consistent across the setting.

Parents and carers were involved in nursery life. Planned events such as stay and play days had been well received by families and contributed to strengthened relationships that supported meeting children's needs. Parents told us "the nursery have days when we can go in and do play and story time with the children" and "they also have Bookbug classes and big chef little chef classes which I have attended with my child."

Older children were encouraged to make independent choices throughout their session, including snack time. We observed snack time to be a time for children and staff to talk together and connect. For example, creating snack menus and shopping list for the following week. This experience promoted children to develop skills in literacy and numeracy through conversation and problem solving, as well as promoting their independence. This promoted a positive snack experience. We discussed how snack times could be further developed for younger children to reflect a similar approach.

Children benefited from a relaxed, unhurried lunchtime experience. Older children were involved in the preparation for lunch time, helping to promote a sense of responsibility. For example, setting the relevant number of place settings for their peers. Children were confident with this routine, contributing to their independence and numeracy skills. Whilst children had some opportunities for self-serving, we discussed providing further opportunities for children to develop their independence and skills for life.

Medication was stored appropriately and easily accessible. Boxes were clearly labelled with children's names.

We discussed how approaches could be further developed to ensure medication was being regularly reviewed with parents and recorded appropriately within consent forms. The service agreed.

Quality indicator 1.3: Play and learning

Children were playing throughout the service with friends and staff. Children were engaged in their play and having fun. Children were eager to share their preferences which included, the creative area, reading books and playing outside. Comments included "I love going outside, playing with Lego, reading a book and playing in the home corner" and "I love going to nursery to see all the ladies and my friends and playing with the Lego and the cubes."

Staff provided a mixture of spontaneous and planned experiences to support children's learning through play. One parent told us "my child gets to play indoors and outdoors. I see evidence of all types of learning but what I notice is that it's all play based." A rolling snack and free-flow approach meant older children's play was not unnecessarily interrupted and they could make meaningful play choices, promoting child led play. However, we discussed reviewing the pace of the day at key times to ensure children's choice and child led play was recognised and valued.

There were a good range of varied play experiences to support children's play and learning. Resources were displayed in a way that promoted choice and independence. Older children were confident in making independent choices and were engaged in their learning. We observed children engage in play experience for prolonged periods of time showing high levels of engagement, excitement wonder and awe. For example, older children making masks using creative materials and younger children enjoyed role play and the use of real foods for chopping, exploring and eating.

Play experiences developed children's skills in language, literacy, and numeracy. For example, when exploring playdough, older children were discussing different textures and scents, and were encouraged to predict what might happen next. They could confidently use mathematical language to predict how many more blocks it would take when building structures. Younger children were exploring concepts in the sand area and told us 'oh, my sandcastle has broken in half.' The service should consider adding further resources both indoors and outdoors to enhance children's literacy and numeracy skills. For example, adding resources within house corner and mud kitchen areas, to encourage mark making and measuring.

Children in the two-three's were engaged in songs and stories throughout the morning, helping to support their literacy development and supporting children's interests. For example, singing "The wheels on the bus" song when children were exploring cars, trains and vehicles.

Most staff were responsive to children through skilled observations, responding appropriately to enhance learning, through skilful questioning, extending children's thinking and learning. Staff should continue to develop their skills and confidence in extending children's learning through meaningful conversations. To further support staff's understanding of how children learn and develop, the management team should continue with planned training and development opportunities.

Planning approaches to support children's learning and development had undergone recent changes. Children benefitted from a planning in the moment approach, with staff observing children and following their interest to promote their learning through a range of active, experiential opportunities. As a result of this children were engaged in play, helping to support their progression and development.

How good is our setting?

4 - Good

We evaluated this key question as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 2.2: Children experience high quality facilities

The playroom was clean, bright and offered a range of spaces for children to make choices, support interest and develop ideas. Some homely touches, such as displays, photographs and soft furnishings helped create a welcoming environment for children and their families. We discussed reviewing some play spaces to ensure children had space to move and explore freely. For example, considering the position of some larger pieces of equipment. Parents commented "I feel the environment itself, is so welcoming and warm, my [child] feels comfortable", "they have provided a nurturing, caring and warm ethos" and "I always feel the playroom is calm, busy and all children engaged in their learning."

The freely chosen play opportunities allowed children to lead and direct their own learning. We discussed with the service on improving the opportunities for younger children to access their garden and increase opportunities for free flow opportunities. Staff agreed this would be better for children. Staff began to action this on the second day and recognised the positive impact this had on children. Further review is needed on staff deployment to support this. (This is discussed further in 4.3 staff deployment)

Both indoor and outdoor spaces boasted a range of experiences, toys and materials available to children to stimulate their natural curiosity. For example, blocks, loose parts, play dough, sensory items and a well-resourced creative station. We discussed how this could be enhanced in some areas, to support children's creativity, imagination and play based experiences. For example, open ended material in the house corner that reflects children's cultures.

The service was in the process of completing an environmental audit called 'through the eyes of a child'. This had supported the service to develop areas, to ensure they reflected the interests and needs of children. The service should continue to audit the environment, giving consideration to the position and content of some wall displays, to enable children to interact with them.

Health and well-being was promoted through outdoor play experiences. The garden provided a range of spaces for the development of physical skills and exploration. Opportunities for risky play were provided with children assessing their own risks. For example, balancing on tyres and using large pieces of physical equipment. Children also had opportunities to explore the large adventure playground within the school grounds. Children were confident when using all areas of the outdoor space. Children told us "I love playing in the garden", "I like playing on the bikes" and "look at me", when climbing confidently on the 'A frame'.

The outdoor area offered natural, loose parts and open-ended material that supported curiosity and imagination. Most resources were easily accessible for children to independently access and direct their learning outdoors. Children were engaged in play opportunities including making potions at the mud kitchen. When outdoors, younger children explored water play and role play. For example, in the shop. Parents told us "my [child] loves to play outdoors" and "there is a fully equipped outdoor area for my [child] to play in, they have bikes and water play."

The use of outdoor sheltered areas for storage of outdoor clothing, supported older children with the transition to outdoors and allowed them space to develop their independence and self-help skills, whilst getting dressed for outdoor play. The service had plans to further develop opportunities to support transitions and independence.

For example, further developments to the sheltered areas and location/storage of outdoor clothing for younger children. We agree this would enhance outdoor provision.

Children benefitted from a safe and secure setting with a range of safety measures in place to ensure children did not come to harm. This included secure entry systems, clear boundary fencing, secure gates, as well as regular headcounts and communication between staff. We discussed with the service to be mindful of the positioning of some items near the fence.

Infection control practices minimised the potential spread of infection, supporting a safe environment for children. The nursery was clean and handwashing took place regularly. Nappy changing areas were clean, with protective personal equipment (PPE) being stored appropriately. We identified some areas that would benefit from further action. For example, removing items that should not be stored in toilet areas. The manager agreed and had taken actions to address this before the inspection was completed.

Accidents and incidents were managed well to support children's health and wellbeing. Accident forms were completed and appropriate first aid administered when needed. Regular audits of accidents were taking place. However, we discussed how these could be further developed to identify patterns and action's needed to minimise repetition, which would contribute to keeping children safe.

How good is our leadership?

4 - Good

We evaluated this key question as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well

There had been recent changes in management within the service. Management and staff engaged well with us and were confident, open and professional in their discussions, receptive to feedback and willing to make improvements to ensure good outcomes for children. They were committed to their role and were keen to share their journey and plans going forward. One staff member told us "we are always open to new ideas and thinking which will further develop our professional practice."

The management team worked well together and had a shared vision and understanding of the quality of service they provided. They knew the services strengths and areas for further improvement and were aware of the direction they want to go and were committed to achieving this. Plans were in place to review the service's vision and values, with all stakeholders. We agreed this would be beneficial in developing shared aspirations.

There was an improvement plan in place which identified key priorities for the service. This included supporting new staff within the setting, empowering and building on their knowledge, skills and confidence. As a result, we were confident that the service was well placed to continue to develop practice with a focus on improving outcomes for children.

Opportunities to include families in the service and welcome their feedback was provided through stay and play sessions, questionnaires and informal chats. Information was shared with families through a range of communication methods, such as newsletters and notice boards, which helped families feel included. Parents told us "the nursery send newsletters out, they ask opinions and also involve me in my child learning" and "we are offered opportunities to share ideas within the nursery, attend courses and liaise with the local community development officer if we require so."

However, some parents felt communication and information sharing could be better. The service discussed how they had plans to further develop their consultation approaches with parents. We agreed this would be beneficial to ensure all parents could contribute towards all aspects of nursery life.

A programme of training was in place, which ensured staff were supported as practitioners. We discussed how this could be further developed to record staffs reflections on training and how it has impacted on creating positive experiences for children.

Staff felt supported by management and that their views and suggestions mattered. Staff told us leaders were "very caring and approachable. They have open door policy to all staff who may need to speak to speak to them. They are a very visible leadership team within the nursery" and "all leads are fully supportive and look out for staff wellbeing." Regular team meetings and opportunities to communicate empowered staff to discuss, identify and take forward areas for improvement.

To ensure continued improved outcomes for children and families, the service should make use of best practice guidance such as 'A quality framework for day-care of children, childminding and school aged children'. In addition, they should continue to develop quality assurance approaches to ensure robust monitoring and evaluation of practice. This will help ensure high quality learning experiences for children and families. For example, room monitoring and peer reflections.

How good is our staff team?

4 - Good

We evaluated this key question as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 4.3: Staff deployment

There had been some recent changes to the staff team. Staff were working to build relationships with each other and to settle into new roles. Staff told us "new staff are warmly welcomed into our staff team and supported in their new role by all the staff" and "we are proud of the welcoming and nurturing environment we work so hard to create amongst the staff team."

Staff were kind, caring and nurturing in their interactions with the children. They were respectful and affectionate towards children, helping to support positive connections. Parents told us "all the [staff] always have a smile on their faces, they are very friendly and welcoming every day and go above and beyond for the children and parents/carers" and "the staff are amazing and I am grateful to them for everything they have done for my kids."

There was a mixture of staff skills, knowledge and expertise across the nursery. This provided opportunities for role modelling and mentoring to less experienced staff. The staffing model in place meant that staff mostly worked within the same room, ensuring children were familiar with staff and supporting continuity of care.

We found that staff were mostly deployed effectively over the day to meet the needs of children. For example, clear staff roles at lunchtimes to ensure staff could remain seated with children while others attended to tasks. However, there were times when the deployment of staff impacted on child led play. For example, limited opportunities for free flow between indoors and outdoors and daily routines in the afternoon.

We discussed with the service where improvements could be made at certain times of the day to ensure staff deployment and daily routines met the needs of children. Management agreed to review this.

Newly appointed staff told us they had been warmly welcomed by the staff and management team. They commented that their induction was positive and helped them to understand their roles and responsibilities and also the expectations of the management team. We discussed how this could be further developed to provide opportunities for staff to reflect on their learning and develop their skills for ensuring positive outcomes for children. We agreed with the manager's plans to use the National Induction resource to support this.

Staff communicated regularly throughout the session with each other, which helped to support children in their play and information was shared to ensure children needs were being met in general.

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	4 - 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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