

Sam's Childminding Services

Child Minding

Helensburgh

Type of inspection:
Announced (short notice)

Completed on:
31 January 2025

Service provided by:

Service provider number:
SP2016987984

Service no:
CS2016346920

About the service

Sam's Childminding Services is registered to provide a service to a maximum of 6 children at any one time up to 16 years of age; of whom no more than 6 are under 12 years; of whom no more than 3 are not yet attending primary school and of whom no more than 1 is under 12 months. Numbers include the children of the childminder's family/household.

When the childminder is working together with an assistant they may care for a maximum of 6 children up to 16 years of age:

- of whom no more than 6 are under 12 years
- of whom no more than 4 are not yet attending primary school
- of whom no more than 1 is under 12 months.

Numbers include the children of the childminder's family/household.

From 15 July 2024 until 30 August 2025 (or before if a child leaves the service), as identified in the variation request dated 19 June 2024, on a Monday and Thursday between 09:00 and 15:00, the childminder may care for a maximum of 6 children up to 16 years of age at any one time without an assistant being present:

- of whom no more than 6 are under 12 years
- of whom no more than 4 are not yet attending primary school
- of whom no more than 1 is under 12 months.

Numbers include the children of the childminder's family/household.

The childminder offered a full day care service. At the time of inspection, nine children were registered with the childminder aged from one to nine years old. Three children were present during the inspection. Early learning and childcare places for children are commissioned from the childminder by Argyll and Bute Council.

The childminding service operates from the childminder's home which is a semi-detached property in Helensburgh, Argyll and Bute. The children can access the facilities on the lower level of the house. There is a large garden to offer children opportunities for fresh air and outdoor play.

The service is close to local bus routes, a primary school and local play parks.

About the inspection

This was a short notice announced inspection which took place on Thursday 30 January 2025. 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 four children using the service and six of their families
- spoke with the childminder
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

Key messages

- The childminding setting provided a warm, inviting environment offering excellent opportunities and resources for children to play and learn safely.
- The childminder demonstrated a strong commitment to continuous improvement and set high standards for children and their families. The childminder was sensitive, kind, caring and consistent in her approach to children which helped them feel safe and secure. She was committed to ensuring high quality outcomes for children and families. The childminder had developed very positive relationships with families which was reflected in their comments to us and resulted in a warm and welcoming ethos within 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?	6 - Excellent
How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
How good is our staff team?	6 - Excellent

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 happy, comfortable and settled within the childminding setting. We could see that children experienced warmth and caring and nurturing approaches to their personal care and learning needs. Children's care was tailored to reflect families' personal preferences and promote children's independence, privacy and dignity. Where children required support with personal care, for example toileting and nappy changing, we observed interactions throughout that were warm, caring and nurturing. Families commented on the childminder's commitment to meeting children's needs: "The childminder is always happy to discuss any matters relating to our child and is always willing to offer advice and support when necessary. It is obvious she wants our child to reach their full potential and works in partnership with us to ensure this happens" and "As well as through the 'all about me' paperwork, the childminder regularly asks about our child's routines, interests and likes/dislikes and you can clearly see this is taken in to account when she is planning experiences for them."

Families were welcomed into the childminder's home to collect and drop off their children. Families appreciated the time the childminder took to talk to them about their children. The childminder valued this time to ensure positive relationships and a mutual exchange of information. Families commented on this: "The childminder is friendly, approachable, knowledgeable, supportive and has a lovely manner with the children. The childminder always takes the time to chat with us about our child's day and their development and is keen to involve us in anything that's happening within her setting" and "Our relationship is very positive - the childminder is always happy to discuss anything regarding our child and answer any questions we have. She has taken the time to get to know myself, my partner and our child and we really feel like she cares about forming a genuine, positive relationship with us all."

The childminder maintained a personal plan for each child to ensure effective arrangements were in place to support their overall wellbeing. The childminder worked closely with families to compile these plans, taking account of the national wellbeing indicators. Older children participated in completing all about me paperwork to express, for example, their likes and dislikes. This showed us the value the childminder placed in involving children and families in their care. Planning focused on these wellbeing indicators to ensure a holistic approach to wellbeing.

A system was in place to ensure that these plans were reviewed regularly which enabled the childminder to respond in a timely manner, sensitively and compassionately to changes in children's lives. Children under the age of two years had their own daily diary, documenting their day, noting foods eaten, sleep patterns, activities and any other individual information on that day that would be useful for their families at home time. The childminder aimed to follow children's individual home routine where possible to allow for consistency and continuity of care. One family commented for their child: "She [childminder] helps me and ensures that my every need is catered for. I find it difficult to communicate as I'm still learning to talk but Sam ensures that I have everything I need. She knows just what to do when I'm upset and feeling a bit scared. She is very kind and ensures that I feel safe."

Children were settled and comfortable in the childminding setting. They were happy to explore and confident to chat with us which demonstrated that children felt secure and had developed secure attachments with the childminder. Children were kind and caring towards each other, which reflected the gentle treatment, cuddles and interactions they received from the childminder.

Children had access to healthy snacks and drinks. Some children brought packed lunches and others had lunch provided by the childminder. Children enjoyed a snack of fruit and breadsticks during our visit. They were offered opportunities for independence through self-service and appropriate seating was provided to ensure children's safety while eating. Children sat well and chatted sociably. They ate well and told us they had enjoyed snack and had recently tried haggis for Burns Night. The childminder told us that the snack menu was reviewed regularly with national guidance (Setting the Table) and took into account children's food likes and dislikes. Older children were able to indicate which food they would like to have before and after school. Where appropriate, children of all ages were involved in making snacks.

Children's emotional wellbeing was supported with sensitive sleep and rest routines in line with best practice guidance.

Children demonstrated a comfortability within the setting. They knew where things belonged, we could see they felt at home there, which corresponded with the childminder's aim to offer a home from home service.

Where children required medication, this was delivered in a safe and sensitive manner following best practice guidance.

Both the childminder, and the assistant, were well-trained and confident in their responsibilities for protecting children from harm, bullying and abuse.

Quality indicator 1.3: Play and learning

The childminder had a sound understanding of child development, theory and practice being both well educated and trained in relevant topics to support positive outcomes for children. The childminder was commissioned to provide early learning and childcare places for the local authority.

We could see that children were making excellent progress in their learning and development in the setting. Families were very positive about the progress their children were making and commented:

"We are very involved in our child's learning journey. We get daily updates from the childminder and photographs to show us what our child has been up to. The childminder is thorough with their journal which details what our child has eaten, how long our child slept for and toileting. The childminder also takes into account our child's individual likes and dislikes and if we tell her something that our child is particularly interested in then she will incorporate this into our child's learning. We also receive our child's Learning Log every few months to have a look at how they are developing and what wellbeing indicators/ milestones our child is hitting. We also have verbal communication at drop off and pick up time where we can let the childminder know of any changes or anything we feel the childminder needs to know and she does the same for us."

"The childminder keeps myself informed about my child's learning progress and often communicates their strengths and weaknesses to myself to help me improve their development."

During our visit, children were meaningfully and actively involved in leading their play and learning through a balance of spontaneous and high quality experiences that promoted children's choice and independence.

The childminder was responsive to children's interests and suggestions. Well-considered resources and creative approaches successfully engaged children's imagination and enriched their play and learning. Play experiences offered children opportunities to develop skills in language, literacy and numeracy. We observed opportunities for sorting, matching and weighing different types of pasta using numeracy and mathematical language; using inset puzzles to develop fine motor and matching skills and counting with numbered wooden logs.

Planning reflected children's ideas and interests and showed how the childminder responded to and promoted creativity, inquiry and curiosity.

Each child had a learning journal containing recorded observations linked to children's activities and learning. Children's progress was tracked using the local authority developmental milestones. Families commented very positively about these learning journals and told us they enjoyed seeing what their children had been learning/doing. Learning journals reflected the broad range of play and learning experiences offered to children. One parent highlighted their child's opportunities for learning in the community: "Our child also spends lots of time outdoors and at different locations within the community so has access to a wide variety of experiences."

Families also told us: "We have regular access to our child's PLP [personal learning plan] and the childminder sends important information home daily in the notebook and sends updates via WhatsApp along with pictures to show everything our child has been up to. The childminder is keen to involve us in our child's learning and care which makes us feel respected and like our voice is listened to"

"Our child has been given the opportunity to explore a variety of experiences daily at the childminder's. Our child accesses each curricular area through play and this is all logged in the Learning Log. Our child has access to the outdoor garden and loves being outside with their friends. Our child also loves the playroom that the childminder has and will always come home and tell us what they have been up to. The childminder also takes our child to soft play on a Monday to meet other childminding children and also to dancing club on a Wednesday, both of which help develop our child's gross motor skills"

"Our child is offered a wide range of play activities such as art/music activities, messy play, role play, loose parts play, risky play etc both indoors and outdoors. The childminder also regularly takes the children on outings to various places within the community which is great - my child participates in a weekly movement class with the childminder and really enjoys it. We are very happy with the variety of experiences offered."

How good is our setting?

6 - Excellent

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

The family provided a warm and inviting environment to children and their families. The home was clean, bright and attractively decorated. Appropriate furnishings and fittings were in place to support the minded children. No health and safety issues were evident at the time of inspection.

Children were kept safe and secure through well-maintained arrangements at the front door. Gates in the garden were closed and secure. The garden was surrounded by fencing which kept children safe outdoors.

A very comprehensive approach to assessing risk indoors, outdoors and on outings ensured that children were safe and protected from identified hazards. Where hazards were identified, clear control measures had been outlined to mitigate risk. The childminder maintained an accurate daily register to record children's attendance and ensured compliance with fire regulations to protect children.

Within the playroom children were able to access enough space to allow them to play together or alone if they chose. Children could make choices from a lovely selection of high quality resources which were at child height. Resources stored above child height were visible and children could ask for these. A large variety of resources was available to support children in their play and learning across the curriculum including a range natural resources to support the youngest children.

The childminder's garden was large, well-maintained, well-resourced and attractive to offer children excellent outdoor play and learning opportunities. A playhouse and pergola were available to protect children from the elements. During our visit, children were wrapped up well to go outside on a cold morning. They enjoyed water play, playing in the playhouse and on the ride on cars. Families appreciated the opportunities for their children to be outdoors for active play and fresh air and commented:

"Our child loves being outdoors and the childminder is always keen to encourage this. Whether it be in the garden, the park or walking to and from school to pick up the older children. Our child is regularly spending a considerable amount of time outdoors throughout the day. The childminder's garden is also really well-equipped to facilitate our child's learning."

"My child loves being outdoors and the childminder always allows them to play outside with a ball/toys or the family dog if the weather allows."

The childminder had registered the food provision aspect of the business with the local authority to ensure compliance with food safety standards. The most recent local authority inspection confirmed that these standards met the criteria for a pass.

Appropriate arrangements were in place to ensure the management and storage of information was carried out in line with national requirements and the service was registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). The ICO upholds information rights in the public interest, promoting openness by public bodies and data privacy for individuals.

Effective measures were in place to prevent and control the spread of infection within the setting. Very good hand hygiene practices were in place and nappy changing was carried out in line with best practice guidance. Children were supported to wash their hands several times during our visit and one child had a nappy change during which the childminder used lovely gentle singing and chatting to involve the child in the process.

Well-functioning arrangements for the monitoring, maintenance and repair of the setting, equipment and vehicles were consistently implemented. We confirmed that appropriate insurance policies were in place.

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.

The childminder demonstrated a strong commitment to continuous improvement and set high standards for children and their families. An improvement plan had been developed to cover all aspects of the setting, which highlighted realistic and achievable targets to improve outcomes for children.

Self-evaluation had been started in 2024, using the Care Inspectorate quality framework to assess what the childminder considered was working well and what could be improved. We suggested that the childminder considered carrying out self-evaluation more regularly and referred her to resources on The Hub - <https://hub.careinspectorate.com/how-we-support-improvement/quality-improvement-programmes-and-topics/early-learning-and-childcare-improvement-programme/>

The childminder had developed very good methods to involve children and their families in assessing the quality of the service. Parents commented:

"The childminder is always open to any suggestions and sends out questionnaires to help get ideas."

"The childminder has asked us how we can develop the service and if there's anything we can do to improve."

"The childminder gives us questionnaires out to evaluate her practice and to allow her to self-evaluate her own practice frequently. She also asks the children what they would like to learn about and what they would like at her house."

"The childminder is always trying to better the care she provides and will regularly ask verbally and through paperwork what is required to support our child in their learning to make the experience even more positive when attending her setting."

"When discussing the plan for a new term she always asks for any ideas on new things and feedback on things/activities the children have already done with her."

Appropriate arrangements were in place to record details of any accidents and incidents occurring and to pass this information on to families. The childminder was trained in first aid to ensure she had the skills and confidence to react to any accidents or health issues arising whilst children were in her care.

How good is our staff team?

6 - Excellent

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

While the childminder was registered to work with an assistant, we noted that this arrangement was used as a contingency plan with the childminder providing a full day childminding service alone. This ensured children and their families always knew who was caring for their children and allowed children to develop secure attachments with the childminder.

Families and children were familiar with the childminder and their assistant and spoke positively about their children's relationships with them.

"The assistant has a great relationship with my child, who feels comfortable speaking to them and will often ask them to play with them if they are at home. The assistant isn't involved in the children's learning/development and but is cover if an emergency occurs and the childminder has to go somewhere which has never happened whilst my child has been in her care."

"Our child loves the assistant and is always happy to see them when we arrive at the setting. The assistant is also happy to chat with us about anything we need to discuss if required."

"When her assistant is around and the weather is good my child has the option to walk to school. My child loves the outdoors and this is something they are always excited to tell us when they come in from school."

"Sam is a phenomenal childminder and my child feels safe and loved when going to this service. I feel content leaving my child with childminder and know they will be cared for and provided for throughout the day. I have no concerns and would 100% recommend the childminder to anyone."

"Our child has grown so much over the last year with the childminder. My child's confidence has grown and they have such a great relationship with the childminder and the other kids they go with. We are so pleased with the care our child receives."

The childminder had established highly effective daily communication with families to ensure the children's wellbeing was of paramount importance. Daily diaries were maintained for the youngest children and messaging platforms were used to ensure open channels of communication.

The childminding service had been operating for eight years and, as a result, the childminder was highly skilled and experienced with well-developed procedures and processes in place to support the role. All paperwork was comprehensive, well-developed and maintained to ensure positive outcomes for children and families.

The childminder had a recognised advanced childcare qualification, a well-developed knowledge and understanding of the skills and qualities required to provide an effective childcare service and ensured her knowledge and practice remained up-to-date through participation in continuous professional development. Since the last inspection, the childminder had participated in a variety of training, evaluating the content of this and considering the impact it would have on her practice. These included:

- Talking and Thinking Floorbooks
- Floorbooks and the Brain
- Paediatric First Aid
- Child Led Planning Creating Meaningful Experiences
- Children's Rights
- Introduction to Adverse Childhood Experiences
- Food Allergy
- The Little Iceberg (Emotional wellbeing)
- Gender Equal Play: Breaking Down Barriers
- Emergency First Aid
- Child Protection/Enhanced Child Protection
- Food Safety
- Child Wellbeing and Protection in Sports.

In addition to this, the childminder had ensured that the childminding assistant had participated in relevant training to enhance their skills and practice, including:

- Paediatric First Aid
- Child Protection in a Childminding Setting
- Introduction to Child Protection
- Introduction to Adverse Childhood Experiences
- Floorbooks and the Brain.

The childminder had developed close working relationships with other childminders in the area, which provided mutual support and development opportunities. She told us this was an extremely effective way to highlight, share and exchange ideas and best practice advice. The childminder also had membership with the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) which was a good source of information and advice.

This meant that children experienced care from staff who were well prepared to provide high quality outcomes.

The childminder was sensitive, kind, caring and consistent in her approach to children which helped them feel safe and secure. She was committed to ensuring high quality outcomes for children and families. The childminder had developed very positive relationships with families which was reflected in their comments to us and resulted in a warm and welcoming ethos within the service.

The childminder's interaction with children was very positive throughout the inspection. The childminder chatted comfortably with children, as well as providing sensitive interaction to extend children's learning particularly around literacy and numeracy during our observations.

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?	6 - Excellent
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	6 - Excellent
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?	6 - Excellent
4.3 Staff deployment	6 - Excellent

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