

Acre Wood Nurseries Ltd

Day Care of Children

Seafield Cottage
Seafield Moor Road
Bilston
Roslin
EH25 9RQ

Telephone: 01314 452 841

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
7 February 2025

Service provided by:
Acre Wood Nurseries Limited

Service provider number:
SP2016012778

Service no:
CS2016350189

About the service

Acre Wood Nurseries Ltd, is registered with the Care Inspectorate to provide a service to 60 children from birth to school entry.

The nursery is located on the outskirts of the village of Bilston in Midlothian. The building is detached and sits in spacious grounds used for outdoor play. The premises provide playrooms for three age groups, with toilets and changing facilities.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced Inspection which took place on 05 February 2025. 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.
- considered feedback from 23 families through an online questionnaire
- considered feedback from 8 staff through an online questionnaire
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents relating to the care of children and the management of the service.

Key messages

- Children's overall wellbeing was being supported by the warm and caring approaches of the staff who took time to listen to children.
- The service should continue with their plan to consider ways that children can be involved in the preparation and self-serving of snacks and meals to promote children's independence.
- Children had fun as they experienced quality play, learning and development opportunities.
- Outdoors and forest schools is a strength in the service, children spent time outdoors having rich experiences.
- Staff should reflect on the access children have to all the allocated playrooms throughout the duration of the day.
- There is a culture of continuous improvement with strong supportive leadership.
- Staff were committed, motivated, and passionate about knowing the children as individuals and the benefits of nature on children's health, wellbeing, and overall development.
- The well-planned deployment of staff ensured children had continuity of care across the day and ensured high quality outcomes for children.

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?	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?

4 - Good

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

1.1 Nurturing care and support

Children's overall wellbeing was being supported by the warm and caring approaches of the staff who took time to listen to them. When children were upset staff provided words of comfort and offered cuddles that promoted positive relationships. Parents told us, "We find staff interested, accommodating and loving towards our child". The team had recently been reflecting on their interactions and terms of endearment to children and were continually developing their supportive interactions in the service. This ensured they supported children's overall wellbeing, development and happiness.

The transitions between rooms were managed and supported by staff. One parent told us, "Transition plans from hedgehog to preschool was excellent for my older child - Staff moved to preschool for a few days to help to settle them." Staff considered and supported these transitions and adapted plans to suit individual needs of children. This resulted in children being happy, secure and confident in the service. One playroom had recently been through a period of change and during quality assurance processes, they had identified that they should develop how they manage transitions of some younger children accessing the garden. Children would benefit from more fluid routines when getting ready to go outside in some playrooms.

Children were familiar with the mealtime routine which was mostly relaxed and sociable. Staff sat and interacted with children, supporting the development of language and communication skill. Children had choices because the chef offered alternatives, and the service consulted on the menu. However, children expressed a desire to help prepare food, but were not given the opportunity. This resulted in missed opportunities to develop independence skills. The service should continue with its plan to involve children in the preparation and self-serving of snacks and meals.

Most children's overall wellbeing was supported by the use of personal planning. Staff worked well with families to get to know the individual needs of the children. Parents told us that, "Time is given at handover to discuss how plan is going, and it's always easy to meet with your key worker if a longer meeting is needed", another parent told us "Not seen my child's personal plan." Plans for each child held some information to support their health and wellbeing. Information was regularly but informally reviewed with parents, ensuring it was up to date. Recording of these reviews and updates could have been clearer, however the service had already started the development of new personal plans as part of their improvement planning.

Staff understood the importance of sleep and rest for children's overall development. Children in the older room showed us their cosy cave where they had opportunity for rest and relaxation and could access this independently. Coracle pods used for babies sleep offered babies a relaxed wake up from their sleep where they could independently choose when to get out of bed with staff readily available for any support needed. Camp beds were available in the two-to-three room and staff sat alongside children as they rested. In this room there was access to nappy changing and a corridor. This meant it was unsettling and noisy, while children were trying to rest. As part of their ongoing self-evaluations, the service agreed to evaluate sleep in this room and explore how they could make changes to ensure this was a quieter and more relaxing for children.

A system ensured children's medical needs were reviewed with personal plans and kept up to date. During our visit the service updated their medication permission form to include formally reviewing their medication every 3 months as per guidance. This would remove any potential for reviews or updated information to be missed. We signposted staff to the Care Inspectorate 'New guidance on management of medication in daycare of children and childminding services'. As a result, children's safety was ensured.

1.3 Play and Learning

Children were meaningfully and actively involved in leading their play and learning through a variety of experiences. Children had fun as they experienced quality play, learning and development opportunities. Outdoors and forest schools was a strength in the service. Children spent time outdoors having nice experiences such as planting, growing, forest schools and learning about nature. When asked about experiences their children had been involved in, parents gave examples of fun experiences and one told us, "Educational outdoor play including forest school. Animal care with rabbits, guinea pigs, hatching quail eggs. Range of indoor toys, imaginative play, messy play, arts. Reading with staff & early numeracy. Play activities & areas are well thought out, child-centred and updated often." As a result, children's learning and development benefitted from the wide range of opportunities available.

Children were able to access resources independently, supporting their choice in how to play. One room were moving through a period of change and staff were continually evaluating how they can make improvements to the indoor play spaces and resources. The team planned to develop the environment to enhance play and learning opportunities and experiences for this age group. When children in this age group were limited to one room the number of resources on offer and the space for play was restricted. As a result this impacted on children's play and learning. Staff should now reflect on the access children have to all the allocated playrooms throughout the duration of the day to support children's play and learning.

A mix of planned and spontaneous experiences promoted children's choice and independence. A parent told us, "There are new topics every week. These involve learning about nature, the body, letter, numbers, etc. They always come out with crafting, drawing, or outdoor activities related to those topics. He still talks about how they made a crocodile costume for one of the teachers and then played tag in the garden. He also often comes home with pretty art works he made that day. Other activities are outside like learning about mushrooms." The team understood child-led planning and have developed planning in agreement with local authority through quality assurance visits. Recently children had been learning about children's mental health week. Children were confident speaking about feelings, naming emotion faces, reading colour monsters, talking about breathing and yoga. In younger rooms they had been introduced to Chinese New Year and offered play experiences linked to schemas that staff had observed from children's play. Staff should now consider how they are evaluating their planning, focussing on if there are any next steps to develop children's learning further. Staff were in the early stages of developing online floor books for outdoors to include children's ideas and voices, learning and next steps. Implementing this will enhance planning, enabling children to reflect and extend their learning, and thereby deepening their engagement.

From the sample of observations we looked at, observations were detailed and informative. We agreed with staff there needed to be a more consistent approach to recording next steps in children's learning. There were no clear observations that supported the progress of any next steps. Staff had the capacity to take this forward as a team.

Children's opportunities for play and learning are enhanced through connections to their community. Visits to the park, vets and local woodland helped children develop a sense of community and the world around them. Staff spoke positively about the 'Annual Garden party' where all families and staff were invited along

to create a real sense of community which gave opportunities for families to get to know families. It supported them to build that home-from-home ethos where everyone felt welcome and included.

How good is our setting?

4 - Good

2.2 Children Experience High Quality Facilities

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

Children were welcomed into a comfortable, homely and inviting setting. There was ample space in the setting for children's care, play and learning needs. Some self-evaluation was needed around how play spaces were used and accessibility of these at times throughout the day. Staff could continue to monitor and assess use of these rooms so they can adapt them to children's interests and current stages of play and learning. This will result in higher engagement throughout the day.

Outdoor learning was important to the service where they strived to encourage children to be outdoors most of the day through their vision of free flow access. Forest school sessions were popular, and we received positive feedback about this. For example, "I love Bruce and Forest School so so much. I love learning about animals and being at the fire to cook" and "My child takes part in forest school each week where they have made a walking stick, bark bread, pine tea and made their own butter off the back of a snack time discussion. Many arts and craft activities, story times and lots of outdoor play." Most children benefited from access to the outdoors throughout the day and as a result children's health and wellbeing was supported.

Overall, the indoor and outdoor environments had been sensitively structured and took account of the children's stages of development and learning. Children in Pre-school benefitted from a variety of open-ended resources, loose parts and sensory experiences inviting curiosity, exploration and intrigue. Cosier areas with soft cushions were available to relax, alongside areas for gross motor development. The manager and staff should continue to evaluate and arrange spaces in younger rooms to reflect children's interests and curiosities, focus on open ended (no fixed purpose) and real resources to invoke imagination and challenge.

The setting and equipment were safe, secure and well-maintained. Staff were complimentary of the support received from both the manager and director in ensuring maintenance issues were resolved quickly and efficiently, creating a safe environment for children. Staff commented, "Staff are vigilant and make management aware of any issues surrounding any of this, we are able to request new things and plan if any concerns. We get regular maintenance lists as well."

Accidents and incidents were recorded and shared with families. These were audited to identify any recurrent themes which helped keep children safe.

Infection and prevention control supported the safety of the children through practices such as good hand hygiene. Children washed their hands at key points throughout the day such as, after messy play, being outdoors and before eating. Staff told us, "The cleaner is full time and cleans the building each night. The staff and I also clean up after the children throughout the day to maintain a clean and healthy and safe environment". Due to the outdoor nature of the setting and the current weather this meant the outdoor areas were muddy and travelled into playrooms, leading to unclean flooring in preschool. The service had identified this as an issue and were working to ensure infection and prevention control was developed in this area.

How good is our leadership?**5 - Very Good****3.1 Quality Assurance and Improvement are well led**

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 manager and staff were committed to providing positive outcomes for children. A shared vision reflected the aspirations of the setting, the children, families and the wider community. This resulted in a strong ethos across the team and service which clearly demonstrated some of the nursery aims and objectives to always put the child at the centre of everything they do and a strong focus on outdoor learning.

There is a culture of continuous improvement with strong supportive leadership. One parent told us, "They treat every day as a school day as they are always keen to learn me and my child's views on what we think would improve this service and what we would like to get out of the service". Parents we spoke with told us how they suggested improvements such as mats in the baby room and this was acted upon immediately. It was evident in the improvement plan that consideration had been given to consulting stakeholders in the development of the plan. Both staff and families shared that they had any developments listened to and acted upon. As a result, children benefited from a service that was well led.

The leadership of the service supported staff to reach their full potential. Staff were encouraged and supported to access training opportunities to support them in their role. Staff recorded their training records independently, however the service could adopt approaches to record overviews of staff training and measure the impact training has had on the service. Regular support, supervisions and appraisals were in place which resulted in a team that was passionate about making improvements and utilised individual staff skills. Staff told us, "We have an open-door policy, and I feel I can go to my leaders when I need support or have any questions. I have regular supervisions and appraisals" and "Leaders foster an environment where you can express our needs and concerns openly. They conduct regular assessments of our emotional and physical wellbeing through one-on-one conversations. Leaders encourage a strong teamwork culture, ensuring colleagues support each other in stressful times." As a result, staff were supported to carry out their role whilst reflecting on and developing the service.

Effective self-evaluation and quality assurance processes highlighted strengths and areas to improve. The recent introduction of a health and wellbeing co-ordinator role within the staff team meant that quality assurance processes were being supported in this area. There were opportunities for the leadership team and staff to review and monitor various aspects of the service. Rooms carried out their own informal self-evaluations and could develop more formal approaches to recording these improvements. The manager was in the early stages of developing a self-evaluation floor book aimed at developing the recording of improvements. This will support a team approach to making improvements to outcomes for children. A calendar helped ensure that all aspects of the service were regularly reviewed. Children, families and staff were regularly consulted about the quality of the service and made suggestions on how it could be improved. As a result, the service continued to improve based on the views of children, families and staff.

The current improvement plan was targeted and focused on improving personal plans and developing challenging and rich learning opportunities in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. The team had started to improve personal plans and should continue with their developments of these. This was done through a measured and planned approach. As a result, improvements in the setting were having a positive impact on experiences for children.

4.3 Staff Deployment

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.

Staff were committed, motivated and passionate about knowing the children as individuals and the benefits of nature on children's health, wellbeing and overall development. Staff worked very well together, and they identified strongly with the values of the service. This resulted in a happy, nurturing, and enabling atmosphere with children at the heart.

Parents were complimentary of the staff team. They told us, "There is a very good reason there is a long waiting list for places at this nursery and as a family we count ourselves very lucky and blessed to have been able to put all three of our children into Acre Wood. Kath and the team are outstanding", "The Acre Wood team go above and beyond to make children's time at the nursery special" and "Another aspect of value to us is the gender mix of teachers. My two boys have both spoken about working in nurseries when they're older due to the representation within the staff team." Staff values, skills, experience, and knowledge resulted in high quality experiences for children.

The well-planned deployment of staff ensured children had continuity of care across the day. One parent told us, "There's always enough staff present to meet my child's needs I know this because I've met them all they are always aware of my child's whereabouts and activities I get a detailed handover insuring me of adequate staffing levels." The service planned to be over staffed for the required ratios. This was to ensure there was available support throughout the day where it was needed. Staff made good use of walkie talkies to support one another and worked well together. Breaks were planned in a way to minimise impact on children whilst enabling staff to be refreshed. Staff told us, "We try to plan ahead and work with extra staff just in case. Pre School work at a 1:5 ratio so we can have extra bodies in case of sickness etc" and "Numerous times there has been more staff than needed in regard to the ratio, however this has made the day a lot less stressful and allowed more 1:1 opportunity for children". This ensured the safety and high-quality outcomes for children.

There was a real focus of developing the staff skills and areas of interests. A variety of training and professional development opportunities allowed staff to develop their skills and knowledge to meet the needs of children. Staff understood the benefits of training in furthering outcomes for children and were motivated and keen to further their development. The manager had recognised individual skills within the team including, for example, that the nursery chef had a passion for outdoor learning. They had been supported through qualifications and training to now lead forest sessions in the service. Room leaders were registered as lead practitioners with the Scottish Social Services Council, and were being supported to access and achieve leadership qualifications to meet their registration conditions. The service had delegated responsibilities to these staff to promote their leadership skills within the service. Good use was made of staff's differing skills and knowledge ensuring that children could experience positive and safe environments throughout the day. A Parent told us, "Acre Wood has amazing staff retention with many staff having been there for several years. There has never been any need to change groups about short notice or cancel sessions as I have known to happen at other nurseries".

When asked about the most positive aspects of nursery one parent said, "The caring nature and love from all staff. The leadership and their support of families". When asked what could make the service better, one parent commented, "It would be great if the staff doesn't change. Since they are wonderful staff." This showed that staff have a real team ethos that benefits the children and families using the service.

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?	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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