

Watten Early Learning Centre Day Care of Children

Parish Hall
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Telephone: 07785 946 709

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
30 January 2025

Service provided by:
CALA Direct Management Services

Service provider number:
SP2010011106

Service no:
CS2010278794

About the service

Watten Early Learning Centre is based in Watten Village Hall in Watten, Caithness. The service provided by CALA Integrated Services is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 24 children; aged from two years nine months to those not yet attending primary school. The service operates term time only.

The premises consists of a playroom with a kitchen area, toilets and reception area. The nursery also has use of the large hall and a large enclosed outdoor play area for physical activities.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Wednesday 29 and 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 children using the service
- reviewed online questionnaires from eight parent and carers
- spoke with three staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Children were very well nurtured and supported through their daily experience by kind and caring staff.
- Children benefitted from a very good range of open ended, natural child centred resources, enabling them to explore their creativity, imagination and problem solving skills.
- Children's progress in learning and development was not yet consistently recorded through observations.
- Children were offered exciting and developmentally appropriate play spaces, both indoors and outdoors.
- A shared vision across the nursery created an inclusive ethos.

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

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| How good is our care, play and learning? | 4 - Good |
| How good is our setting? | 5 - Very Good |
| How good is our leadership? | 4 - 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 made an evaluation of good, for this key question. As several important strengths taken together clearly outweighed areas for improvement. Whilst some improvements were needed, the strengths identified had a significant positive impact on children's experiences.

Quality Indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support

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

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

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

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

Children benefitted from their families being warmly welcomed into the service. They were enabled to support their children to settle in and participate in stay and play sessions. Establishing good working relationships with parents was important to the staff. There was daily communication with families at drop off and collection time as well as online updates. All parent's felt communication was effective. Meaningful relationships had been formed with families who told us they felt included in the nursery community. This holistic approach resulted in children that were happy and learning, and families felt valued and included. One parent commented, "Staff work closely with parents and have regular parent meetings".

Quality Indicator 1.3: Play and learning

Children led and directed their play experiences throughout the day. This allowed them to become absorbed in their play, impacting positively on their health and wellbeing. They were well supported to communicate their wishes in a way that reflected their individual interests, needs and preferences. As a result, children were busy and engaged in meaningful play experiences.

Children chose to play outdoors or indoors either in the main playroom or in a large hall. Some children enjoyed the freedom of the hall playing on bikes. This supported active energetic play and contributed to the development of motor skills. Outdoors, children were offered a variety of opportunities to be creative, develop problem solving skills and have fun. We observed children assessing risk and having fun with large loose parts. They also had fun playing in water and digging in the mud. They were very excited to show us bird food they had made for feeding the birds in the nursery garden. This gave children a sense of responsibility and encouraged good discussions with staff about different bird species and their eating habits. The outdoor area had a well-resourced literacy shed with materials to extend their play and develop early hand writing. As a result, children were happy and developing lifelong skills.

Overall staff were skilled in enriching children's interests and learning through well-timed, skilful interactions. Children's learning benefitted from these effective interventions to extend knowledge and understanding. Some good quality staff interactions supported children's interests, enabling deep engagement in imaginative play. This promoted communication between the children, developing their social and language skills. Some children were at the stage of mark making. There were missed opportunities to extend learning or to engage children in talking about their written representation and to support numeracy development.

Children's progress in learning and development was not yet consistently recorded through observations. The service had identified this as an area for continued development. Consideration should be given to developing a system which effectively identifies and records next steps in learning through high quality observations.

Children's play and learning was enhanced through strong connections to the wider community. Opportunities had been developed to support intergenerational learning. This encouraged children to build valuable connections with members of their wider community.

How good is our setting?

5 - Very Good

We evaluated this key question as very 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 staff team had worked hard to create an attractive and stimulating environment. As a result, children were offered exciting and developmentally appropriate play spaces, both indoors and outdoors. The effective and well considered use of real resources and natural materials provided children with a wealth of exciting opportunities. This enabled them to be curious, creative and develop enquiry skills across all areas of learning.

The playroom was well thought out and planned to maximise children's play and the playroom was decorated in neutral colours which promoted a natural, calm environment. This fostered a welcoming atmosphere for the children. The addition of homely touches and carefully considered furnishings, supported children to feel valued and gave a strong message that they matter.

Children had opportunities to rest and relax in safe, cosy areas. Blankets and cushions were available for children to independently access. This enabled children to seek out a calm area where they could have some individual time if needed. This supported children's emotional wellbeing.

Children had direct access to the outdoor garden space, giving them good opportunities for free flow play between indoors and outdoors. They moved freely between the play areas and engaged in a variety of outdoor play experiences. Children used the outdoor space with confidence and experienced enjoyment, challenge and fun. Areas to climb, run and balance outdoors provided opportunities for children to develop their gross motor skills.

Staff implemented infection, prevention and control routines to minimise the potential spread of infection. Children were encouraged to wash hands frequently and at appropriate times. Established routines meant children were supported to be healthy.

How good is our leadership?

4 - Good

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

Quality Indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well

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

A shared vision, values and aims had been developed in consultation with staff and families. These were aspirational and captured the uniqueness of the setting which contributed to the positive ethos. The service valued opinions and involvement of children and their families. Regular feedback from families took place through a variety of methods such as, face to face discussions, questionnaires and feedback requests.

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

Support and supervision systems were not yet supporting continuous improvement. Staff had identified learning targets; however, these were not consistently followed up to assess the impact on children's outcomes and experiences. We discussed ways in which the service could strengthen their processes. For example, linking support and feedback to formalised observation of staff practice.

We spoke with the manager about developing opportunities for the service to look outwards and reflect on practice with colleagues from other settings to provide time for further professional dialogue and peer support.

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

How good is our staff team?**5 - Very Good**

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

Quality Indicator 4.3: Staff deployment

Children were cared for by staff who were warm and nurturing. They provided individualised support by effectively engaging with children throughout the inspection. This resulted in children who felt respected within the service. Parents were complimentary of the staff team, comments included, "The staff are fantastic. They're kind and thoughtful, they take the time to really know the children and help them develop in ways that suit their personalities" and "Staff genuinely care about the children and strive to provide the best experiences they can".

Effective arrangements were in place to promote continuity of care across the day. Children received consistent, stable and compassionate care from a motivated and committed staff team. All staff were focused on offering good quality learning experiences through play, in order to achieve positive outcomes for children.

Good use was made of staff experience, knowledge and skills to ensure children received high quality experiences. Additionally, the right number of staff was meeting children's needs, ensuring their safety. Staff were proactive in recognising any gaps and ensuring effective supervision and quality engagement with children. Staff placed themselves thoughtfully to ensure all children's individual needs were well-considered. As a result, children benefitted from a very calm and positive experience.

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

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| How good is our care, play and learning? | 4 - Good |
| 1.1 Nurturing care and support | 5 - Very Good |
| 1.3 Play and learning | 4 - Good |
| How good is our setting? | 5 - Very Good |
| 2.2 Children experience high quality facilities | 5 - Very 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? | 5 - Very Good |
| 4.3 Staff deployment | 5 - Very Good |

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