

Acorn Day Nursery Day Care of Children

The Steadings
Kinaldy Farm
St. Andrews
KY16 8NA

Telephone: 01334475698

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
18 February 2025

Service provided by:
Acorn Day Nursery (St. Andrews)
Limited

Service provider number:
SP2018013053

Service no:
CS2018363762

About the service

Acorn Day Nursery is registered to provide a day care of children service to a maximum of 52 children at any one time who are not yet attending primary school. Of these 52, no more than 19 may be aged under three years and of these 19, no more than nine may be aged under two years.

The service is provided by a private provider who is in partnership with Fife council to provide funded places. The service is situated on a farm steading close to the town of St. Andrews. It is surrounded by local farmland where the children can visit farm animals. There are also local beaches and woodland areas nearby. The nursery setting comprises of two playrooms, toilet and nappy changing facilities; one playroom offers direct access to the nursery garden.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 17 February 2025 between 08:30 and 16:30 and 18 February between 09:30 and 12:00. 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, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- observed children using the service
- spoke with children attending the service
- received feedback from nine families
- spoke with the staff and management team
- observed practice
- reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Children were happy, settled and having fun. They experienced warm, caring and nurturing approaches to support their overall wellbeing.
- Children were provided with appetising and nutritious snacks and homemade meals.
- The approach to planning and observations should be improved to effectively support all children.
- Children were capable, confident and happy outdoors, they had fun exploring the woodland area, developing skills in risky play.
- A range of systems were in place for the nursery which supported a culture of continuous improvement. These could be further enhanced to support the cycle of improvement.
- Staff were warm and friendly in their approach which promoted a happy and inclusive environment.

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.

1.1 Nurturing care and support

Children experienced warm, caring and nurturing approaches to support their overall wellbeing. They were happy, settled and having fun. Children were supported to make choices as staff were attuned to their routines and what was important to them. As a result of these supportive interactions, close bonds between staff and children had been developed. These helped children feel included and safe as they were cared for in a consistent way.

Children were provided with appetising and nutritious snacks and homemade meals. One parent commented, 'they have an excellent cook, and [child] really enjoys the food there'. Younger children had a positive, unhurried mealtime experience which included time to build nurturing relationships with staff as they sat with children. Opportunities for children to be independent were provided as older children experienced a free flow lunch. This ensured play was uninterrupted and created a relaxed and unhurried atmosphere which meant children were happy, confident, and learning important life skills. There were some missed opportunities for independence, such as self-serving. Consideration should be given to extend these opportunities, supporting children to develop lifelong skills.

Children's wellbeing and comfort was provided for. This included appropriate opportunities to meet younger children's need for sleep, rest and relaxation. Staff were attentive to children and offered reassurance and cuddles if they were unwell or needed some downtime. Babies experienced personal care in a sensitive and gentle manner. Positive interactions promoted children's dignity and supported them to be nurtured through daily experiences. The approach to nappy changing was warm, caring and respectful to support children's security and confidence.

Children's personal planning information contained basic details to support staff to get to know children. Further consideration could be given to ensure 'All About Me's' contain relevant and specific information to support younger children. Chronologies for recording key events were in place which supported management to have an overview of significant events in a child's life. These could be further developed to ensure key information is detailed to fully support children and families in all aspects of their lives.

To ensure children's continued wellbeing and safety, we asked the service to improve medication management practices. We identified and discussed inconsistencies in the recording of medication, particularly in documenting signs and symptoms indicating when medication was needed. Additionally, we advised on adhering to current guidelines for managing large quantities of paracetamol-based medication, promoting robust and effective medication management systems.

Children benefitted from their families being warmly welcomed into the service. They were enabled to support their children to settle in. Establishing good working relationship with parents was important to the staff. All parents strongly agreed or agreed that they had a strong connection with the staff caring for their child. There was daily communication with families at drop off and collection time as well as online updates. Parent comments included: 'feel that parents are welcomed into the room at any time and made to feel part of the nursery community', and 'Staff are kind and caring and very attentive to [child's] needs. I am

comfortable talking to them about anything regarding my child and they always provide good feedback at end of night'. This contributed to creating positive attachments between children and staff, and enabled opportunity for information to be shared between nursery and home.

1.3 Play and learning

Children had fun as they experienced good quality play experiences. Older children had opportunities to lead their learning and choose what resources to play with. As a result, they engaged in play for long periods of time, and this increased their confidence and supported their wellbeing and involvement. There was scope to ensure provision for younger children met their developmental needs. For example, sensory play such as water was not readily available.

Staff were cheerful, smiley, and promoted a fun ethos. We heard singing, saw stories being read, and observed staff play and chat with children. This helped sustain children's interests and supported their self-esteem and confidence. Most staff knew when to provide support and when to encourage the children to be independent. This led to happy children who were eager to try new things.

Overall staff were responsive, enabling children to develop their play at their pace. Staff engaged with babies and younger children at their level in a warm and kind manner, offering support at a pace that was right for them. Staff used effective questioning during interactions in the forest to support and extend children's understanding. However, this was not consistent across the day as there were some missed opportunities to extend older children's play and learning through effective interaction.

Play experiences were in place to support children to develop skills in language, literacy and numeracy. This included mark-making, sorting and matching. Staff were available to children for storytelling and discussions. This supported children's enjoyment of literacy and the development of their talking and listening skills. Staff's spontaneous singing created a sense of joy and supported the youngest children's language development.

Children's play and learning was enhanced through strong connections to the local community. This included daily walks and regular outings for all children to a variety of local areas including the beach and local theatre. These experiences stimulated children's interests and curiosities.

Staff were evolving planning approaches to be more child centred and responsive to children's individual needs and interests. Intentional approaches to planning needed further development to ensure planned experiences were always developmentally appropriate and tailored to meet individual learning needs. Additionally, the quality of learning observations within children's personal learning journeys were inconsistent. They did not always detail the individual learning or skills that were being developed. This made it difficult to track children's progress and identify where additional support or challenge was needed **(see are for improvement 1)**.

Areas for improvement

1. To support children to achieve, the service should improve planning for children's learning and tracking and monitoring their progress. Staff should be supported to develop their understanding of how to effectively observe and assess children's learning in order to plan quality learning experiences and meaningful next steps.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which

state: "I am supported to achieve my potential in education and employment if this is right for me." (HSCS 1.27).

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.

2.2 Children experience high quality facilities

Children experienced a warm, calm and welcoming environment. Careful consideration had been given to soft lighting, creating a cosy and comfortable ambience for children to play and learn.

Both indoor and outdoor environments were developmentally appropriate spaces for children. There was a good range of materials available for children to play with, such as treasure baskets for younger children and loose parts for older children. There were missed opportunities for children's play to be fully extended as not all areas were resourced to their full potential. For example, writing tables were not sufficiently resourced. . There was scope to further develop schematic and sensory play opportunities for younger children. This will support all children to experience high quality play and learning.

The service was ideally situated to make good use of local amenities. For example, children had access to a local woodland area. This space allowed children to explore a natural environment, which provided opportunities for active, energetic, explorative play as well as providing access to fresh air. Children were capable, confident and happy outdoors. They had great fun exploring the woods, playing with their friends and using natural resources in different ways supporting imaginative play. Children were supported by staff to climb trees and logs, allowing them to manage and assess risk and build self-confidence. Staff effectively engaged with children to help them understand the risk of the fire pit. One parent told us, 'The children go to the forest and toast marshmallows round the fire'. As a result, children were able to assess and manage risky play opportunities with confidence. . Other parents comments included, 'I am a huge supporter of the forest days I think this is invaluable to child development. Lots of trips, daily walks and options to play in the nursery garden, visit the farm animals', 'Acorn's outdoor experience offering is really exceptional!' and 'The forest is truly special'.

Children's safety was enhanced as risk assessments were in place. Staff spoke confidently about how these supported them to assess play environments, for example, whilst using the forest area. Infection, prevention and control practices such as the use of PPE and food safety practices supported children to stay safe. Most children were well supported to wash their hands at key times, for example, before mealtimes. However, we identified some infection prevention and control issues in relation to toilet facilities such as storage of potties and chipped paintwork The manager and provider were responsive to issues identified and had begun to take action to address areas identified.

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.

3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well

Regular communication with families also took place through a variety of methods including email, a private

social media group and face to face discussions. This supported families to feel included and respected as partners in their children's development and learning.

The views of children and families were actively sought by the service to inform the development of the setting. Through questionnaires, families had the opportunity to feedback ideas towards the development of the service. Some parents felt this could be improved and one commented, 'Surveys are sent to us but only after stay and plays. It often feels like the service is only looking for positive feedback. Not sure any feedback is ever action upon or is just a paperwork exercise'. We suggested to the service that they review their methods for feeding back to families following consultations.

A range of systems were in place for the nursery which supported a culture of continuous improvement. For example, an improvement plan which was relevant was in place and supported positive outcomes for children. Staff had taken on leadership roles with some aspects of the improvement plan. For example, leading on the seven themes of learning across the nursery, which were linked in with early years frameworks. This meant staff had a good understanding of service developments and improvements.

Good quality assurance process ensured that various aspects of the service were monitored and changes made to improve practice. For example, the lunch experience for older children had recently been reviewed, with changes made. There was scope to enhance monitoring of some aspects of practice, such as medication, which were not yet robust. We discussed with the manager how quality assurance processes could be further enhanced, for example ensuring clear actions are identified and are reviewed. This would support a continuous cycle of measurable improvement. We encouraged the manager to also develop opportunities for the service to look outwards by supporting staff to visit, review and engage in professional dialogue with colleagues from other settings.

We received some concerns with regards to the managers conduct and shared this with the manager and provider. The provider agreed to continue to support the service and manager. The manager should consider how staff can be given regular, positive and constructive feedback in a supportive manner. Staff need to feel empowered, motivated and inspired to plan and make improvements to children's experiences and outcomes.

The manager and staff fully engaged in the inspection process, and most appreciated the guidance and signposting to best practise offered by the inspectors. The manager and staff demonstrated their commitment to the service and were motivated to make improvements to ensure positive outcomes for children.

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.

4.3 Staff deployment

Staff were caring and nurturing and committed to providing a positive experience for all children. They were warm and friendly in their approach which promoted a happy and inclusive environment where children could play and have fun. Several parents spoke positively about the staff team. Comments from parents included, 'When we arrive [staff] talk to [child] and then to us. This is important. The staff know us by name and we know them. They share our values and this is also important', and 'I find all staff members approachable and caring towards my child'.

Significant changes to the staff team due to staff leaving had some impact on children's outcomes and care. For example, previous training and development opportunities for staff had not been embedded into practice to ensure sustained improvement. There was also scope to develop exit interviews to allow the provider and manager to address the recent high staff turnover effectively.

Families told us that there were always enough staff in this service to meet their child's needs. One parent told us, 'The nursery tries its hardest to always ensure there is an extra staff member in each room everyday'. As a result, staff breaks were well managed across the day to ensure children's routines were not interrupted. Where staff absences occurred, the manager supported staff within the playrooms which provided children with familiarity and consistency of care.

Overall, the ethos between team members was positive and interactions between staff were kind and respectful. This helped create a positive atmosphere for both staff and children to feel comfortable and secure in. Staff communicated well with each other when a task took them away from their designated area. For example, they would inform each other when leaving the room or when attending to a child's needs. As a result, children were sufficiently supervised throughout the day.

Positive working relationships had been formed between staff which meant they were all meaningfully contributing to the inclusive and positive ethos of trust and respect. Regular meetings took place to share information. As a result, the staff team worked collaboratively and supported each other well.

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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