

Linkwood Nursery Day Care of Children

Linkwood Primary School
Thistle Drive
Elgin
IV30 8AS

Telephone: 01343 543 451

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
5 March 2025

Service provided by:
The Moray Council

Service provider number:
SP2003001892

Service no:
CS2020379781

About the service

Linkwood Nursery is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 56 children aged from three years up to primary school age at any one time.

The service operates from purpose-built premises on one level. It has an open plan play room with direct access to a secure outdoor play area. It is located in an urban area on the outskirts of Elgin.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 4 March 2025 between 09:30 and 17:00. One inspector from the Care Inspectorate carried out the inspection. To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included previous inspection findings, registration and complaints information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

This inspection was part of a pilot to test the 'Quality improvement framework for early learning and childcare sectors' developed jointly with Education Scotland. Because this inspection was part of a pilot, no new evaluations (grades) have been awarded.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- Spoke with four children using the service;
- Received 16 completed questionnaires/survey responses;
- Spoke with five staff and management;
- Observed practice and daily life; and
- Reviewed documents.

Key messages

- The service was very well led, and the dedicated staff team demonstrated a positive ethos of high-quality care and learning.
- The manager involved staff, children and families in the continuous development of the service, which led to positive outcomes for children.
- Approaches to play and learning ensured a balance of rich, spontaneous and intentional experiences which were child-centred.
- The indoor and outdoor spaces were well resourced, helping to promote children's curiosity and creativity and supporting their wellbeing.
- Children benefited from very skilled, nurturing and respectful interactions with the staff team who were kind and caring.

Leadership

Leadership and management of staff and resources

There was a strong ethos of continuous improvement within the service which was focused on positive outcomes for children and families. The manager and leadership team demonstrated a very good, shared understanding of the strengths of the service and where they needed to develop. All staff were empowered to share their views and take on "champions" roles in leading developments.

The manager and staff team were committed to a shared vision for the service that reflected their high aspirations for children in their care. The vision was underpinned by values which were simple, clear and visible within the nursery and in communications with families such as the parent/carer handbook. For example, some of the values were upheld through "bucket filling." Conversations around this idea were naturally and regularly woven throughout the day and served as positive reminders to children about the power of kindness and happiness. As a result, values were embedded in the everyday life of the setting. Children and families had been asked for their views of the vision, values and aims for the setting each year. The manager was keen to further develop meaningful ways of involving children and families to ensure that planned developments or improvements took account of children's rights, and reflected the needs and preferences of children and families.

The manager and staff team had created an ethos of shared responsibility for self-evaluation to inform change and secure improvement. They had developed robust processes which enabled all staff to share their views and ideas for improvement. Staff reflected well together and changes were introduced, discussed and embedded at a pace that staff and leaders were comfortable with. An improvement plan was in place which had been informed by gathering the views of staff and children. For example, one of the actions was to improve the spaces and resources for children indoors and outdoors. Staff evidenced children's views and decisions made in via floor-books, which supported the service to review progress and plan next steps. Families told us that they felt involved in developments within the nursery. One parent shared, "There are opportunities in questionnaires to give feedback." Another parent told us, "We are invited to 'stay and play' sessions as well as fundraising opportunities. We are given opportunities to feedback about our child's

experience and make suggestions." As a result, children's voices were heard and helped to tailor care and experiences to their needs. We encouraged the service to continue to find ways of actively engaging parents, carers, and partners from the wider community for all planned improvements, to inform decisions about how the service was provided.

The manager had developed effective and devolved systems for quality assurance, which helped to ensure consistency throughout the setting. Senior staff undertook monitoring of practice and supported staff with constructive discussions. All team members had responsibility for monitoring consistency in aspects of practice such as observations or lunchtime records, or maintaining resources such as the sensory room, first aid kits or art supplies. As a result, agreed standards and expectations were understood by all staff and this was leading to improved and sustained positive outcomes for children and families.

The manager placed a strong emphasis on maintaining a skilled staff team to support the wellbeing of children and staff. A comprehensive and structured induction programme supported new staff to gain and develop skills and knowledge, and enabled the manager to identify any necessary supports. Effective arrangements were in place to share key information about the setting, children and staff as new or temporary staff joined the staff team. This ensured that staff had the knowledge needed to meet the needs of individual children and were confident in their roles. The manager made good use of best practice guidance documents such as the 'Early learning and childcare: national induction resource.' She also utilised the skills and experience of established staff, who were given time and resources to mentor new members of the team. This helped to maintain the quality of children's overall experiences and outcomes.

Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

Children benefited from staff who demonstrated a clear understanding of how children learn and develop. They had made very good use of professional development opportunities which linked to enhanced outcomes for children. For example, the staff team had recently undertaken training on emotions coaching. They told us that this had enabled them to support children as they experienced "big" feelings, by giving them words and strategies. One member of staff said, "Emotion Coaching and Zones of Regulation training has had a positive impact on the children's experiences because I am more confident and feel I can better support the children to co-regulate their emotions." Another team member shared, "We have had speech and language training which gave us simple ways to support our children during play as well as offer parents suggestions for at home support. These types of training help the children in our care reach their potential resulting in a positive nursery experience." We observed staff using strategies for supporting children with emotional regulation and speech development throughout the day. This was enabling children to communicate their needs, which helped to support their wellbeing.

Staff had regular opportunities for discussions as a team to plan, to reflect on practice and training, and this helped to build individual and team knowledge. They also benefited from regular opportunities to meet with the manager. Staff used this time to engage in professional dialogue about their practice, celebrating achievements and recognising where improvements could be made. As a result, they spoke confidently about their roles and responsibilities in supporting children with their overall wellbeing and to meet their potential. The staff team had benefited from shared training sessions with other settings, one member of staff told us, "We have had meetings and discussions in regards to how we deliver planning for the children allowing us to best support their needs within the nursery. These discussions allow for reflection and an opportunity to see how other settings do this allowing us to operate at our best for the children."

Staff benefited from regular formal supervision sessions and annual appraisals with the manager, which gave them opportunities to discuss their strengths and opportunities for development as well as their overall

wellbeing. Informal check-ins with senior staff were also available and staff told us that they valued these supportive discussions. The manager used information from supervision sessions to identify future training needs, and was beginning to develop a training plan linked to identified service-level improvements. We agreed that this practice could enable the manager to tailor quality professional learning opportunities to meet the needs of staff, children and the setting.

Children and families benefited from a staff team that was experienced, caring and flexible. The manager made effective use of their knowledge and skills to ensure that children experienced safe and responsive learning and care. For example, individual staff had "superstar" roles where they took the lead on aspects of learning such as SHANARRI wellbeing indicators - come from the GIRFEC approach and say that children should be safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included; drama; community links and British Sign Language (BSL). There were clear rotas in place for daily roles and responsibilities and staff could adapt these according to children's needs.

Children were supported throughout their day by staff who communicated well with each other. Communications with families as children arrived and left the setting were consistent, so that families felt well informed about their child's day. One parent shared with us, "The nursery room staff are lovely and take time to speak to us about our child, their progress and achievements. They always take time to speak at drop off and pick up, no matter how busy it is."

Children play and learn

Children's engagement

Children were engaged and having fun as they accessed high quality learning experiences within the large playrooms. The two areas were well laid out to provide a wide variety of experiences, while allowing staff to monitor children throughout the entire space. For example, one side of the room contained a construction area, craft tables and water play. These spaces were inviting and enabled children to lead their own play and learning for extended periods of time, or to sit with a member of staff for support in skills such as cutting and threading. The experiences helped children to extend their own thinking and practice new skills. The other play space featured a quiet space, a large role play area and sofas where children were exploring technologies such as cameras and tablets. The imaginative play and storytelling taking place gave children opportunities to develop their thinking and problem-solving skills. For example, in the role play area, they had made a "laptop" from cardboard so they could make appointments in their doctor's surgery. This gave children opportunities to develop their imagination and creativity, and to develop a wide variety of skills. They had time and space to make decisions and develop their learning and independence.

Outside, children had opportunities for energetic play as they ran, or pedalled trikes around the track. Consideration had been given to literacy and numeracy learning outdoors, with well-stocked sheds in place for each. However the windy weather at the time of the inspection was not conducive to sustained play with smaller resources. The manager told us that the staff team had identified the outdoors environment in their draft improvement plan for the next session. We agreed that a review of how the outdoors environment is laid out and used by the children would help to identify ways to enhance play and learning experiences for them. This could include experiences which are more traditionally associated with learning indoors, such as technologies which was a current area of children's interest. Furthermore we suggested that gathering the views of parents and carers could assist in identifying improvements.

Indoors, literacy and numeracy were supported through stories, songs and rhymes, in small groups or more spontaneously during free play. Staff supported children with numeracy games on the smartboard, and

opportunities were taken to count and describe shapes in conversations throughout the nursery. This helped children to make links across their play and learning. Some children were supported to have quiet time in the cosy space where there were more books to select from. We suggested that children would benefit from further literacy and numeracy resources being introduced to role play areas and resources such as water and sand trays, both indoors and outdoors, by enabling them to make further connections in their play and learning.

Children benefited from regular trips into the local community, and from visits by community partners. For example, the nursery visited local woodlands every week, they had regular visits to the school library, and a block of skills sessions at the local tennis club had been arranged. These visits enabled children to gain new skills and a wider understanding of the world. Staff shared with us that they had recently reviewed the woodland trips to ensure that all children's needs were considered, especially those children who found transitions between spaces difficult. We agreed that this was good self-evaluative practice and we encouraged the service to continue to review the offer regularly. This would ensure it remains inspiring and enjoyable for all children. Parents and carers strongly agreed that the use of the local community was a strength of the service. One parent said that they valued, "Lots of outdoor play experience and engagement with the local nature such as the park and woods areas."

Quality interactions

Children benefited from staff who demonstrated a very good understanding of how children learn and progress. They understood the importance of supporting the emotional resilience of children as a foundation to learning. One member of staff told us, "We provide a warm and welcoming environment where children feel cared for. It is our ethos to provide nurture to each child and to meet the individual needs of each child." Their responsive and caring interactions supported children to develop socially and physically, and staff were very aware of the importance of modelling interactions effectively. Another team member said that they aimed to, "Provide experiences to challenge their resilience and problem skills. Allowing them to build their confidence to strive in everyday learning." Staff used a variety of positive interactions such as wondering aloud, adding new vocabulary in conversations or just stepping back and letting play unfold. They encouraged children to try things for themselves and gave them lots of praise for doing so. This helped children to build positive relationships with the staff, and build self-esteem. The manager shared that she was keen to make clear links between children's play and learning, and their rights, and we agreed that focusing on rights-respecting language in all interactions would support the service to do so.

Child-centred planning and assessment

Children benefited from planning that was child-centred. It was based on information gathered by all staff about what the children were interested in, and where they were in their learning. Careful observation of the children enabled staff to follow children's interests and provide opportunities to extend their thinking without directing their play. They skilfully used this knowledge to support, challenge and extend learning and this enabled children to make progress at their own pace. This supported the development of skills such as self-regulation, confidence and curiosity.

Children experienced a wide range of learning opportunities offered through a well thought out balance of intentional and spontaneous planning. Staff confidently explained how they used observations to identify developing skills and learning, and to plan individual children's next steps. This enabled them to contribute to a fortnightly plan for core areas of learning and skills development. One member of staff told us, "Children are regularly involved in planning through voting and mindmaps supporting their choice in areas of the nursery that are interchangeable i.e., home corner, craft table, play dough table." We observed mindmaps which had informed the development of the "doctor's surgery" in the role play area. This approach meant

that children enjoyed rich, challenging play and learning opportunities which reflected their ideas and interests. This enabled children to develop a broad range of skills and knowledge.

Staff worked closely with families and partners to support and celebrate children's learning. They shared individual learning observations and next steps through learning journals and these were shared regularly during keyworker meetings. Achievements were celebrated within the journals and parents were encouraged to comment on all aspects of their child's learning. One staff member told us, "Parents have the opportunity to discuss their child development once a term through a meeting with key workers. This discussions is around their child development and what their next steps are, we will share activities that parents can try at home that support them achieving their next steps. We have also recently introduced an online form that parents can complete to inform their key worker of any concerns or anything they want to share about their child." Parents agreed that they were well informed about their child's play and learning. One parent said, "Through reporting and conversations at pick ups, staff have made me aware they know my child's interests very well and are able to tell me about them, create learning opportunities to deepen my child's knowledge, extend his learning and engage him in things."

Parents were regularly invited into the service and were kept informed about their child's daily experiences through a closed digital platform. This also allowed the service to inform families of key dates and other news. A staff member shared with us, "We have regular stay and play opportunities with activities for parents and children to get involved in. Parents are updated daily through class dojo and through communication with staff during drop off and collection time. The open dialogue we have with parents means we have strong bonds with our families. Our termly newsletter keeps parents updated with what's happening in the nursery too."

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.com.

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