

# Little Acorns Pre-school Learning Centre Day Care of Children

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Heathhall  
Dumfries  
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**Type of inspection:**  
Unannounced

**Completed on:**  
6 March 2025

**Service provided by:**  
Ruby Murphy

**Service provider number:**  
SP2022000213

**Service no:**  
CS2022000321

## About the service

Little Acorns Pre-school Learning Centre is a daycare of children's service and provides school aged childcare, including breakfast club, out of school care and a holiday playscheme. The service provides full day, part time and flexible sessions for families and operates all year.

The service is located in the suburb of Heathhall, Dumfries, in the council area of Dumfries and Galloway. It is close to shops, woodlands, local amenities and a bus route. The service comprises of four spacious playrooms to accommodate children and school aged children. Children have access to cloakrooms and an outdoor play area.

The service is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 79 children at any one time. Of those 79; no more 9 are aged under 2 years; no more than 70 are aged 2 years to those attending school full time, with no more than 20 aged 2 to under 3 and no more than 10 attending school full time. Ruby Murphy is the service provider.

## About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 4 March between 10:00 and 17:00 and 5 March between 9:00 and 16:00. Fifty three children attended the service on the first day of inspection and 54 on the second day. 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 and seven of their families
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed and sampled documents
- spoke with visiting professionals

## Key messages

- Children were happy, safe and secure and having fun with their friends.
- Staff knew children very well.
- Children were leading their own play and learning.
- Staff were kind, caring and very nurturing.
- The service was led well by the management team.
- The staff team was committed to the service and worked well together.
- Families were happy with the service.
- The management team should continue to develop the service through self- evaluation processes.

## 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

### Quality indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support

Children were happy, safe and secure in the care of staff who knew them well. Positive relationships had been formed between staff and children and we observed staff interacting with children in a warm and supportive manner. They praised children and acknowledged their achievements. This helped promote children's confidence and self-esteem.

Staff were kind, caring and responsive to children when they interacted with them and particularly when younger children needed reassurance, for example when they were emotionally upset. Children who needed additional support with their care and learning were well supported. Staff were sensitive and understood individual children's needs and ensured they were fully met by offering one-to-one support when needed. This contributed to children's emotional wellbeing.

Staff knew children very well. Personal plans were detailed and reflected children's interests, likes and preferences. Health and wellbeing indicators were used to ensure children's needs were fully met. Personal plans were regularly reviewed with families and it was evident that they worked in partnership with staff to develop strategies to help children progress and develop their confidence. This meant that children's individual needs were well supported.

Transition arrangements were well organised, planned and responsive to children's needs. Children who were developmentally ready to move through the service were helped to settle in to their new playrooms at a pace that was right for them. Staff exchanged information about children and the new key workers spent time building relationships with children prior to the move. This supported children's emotional security.

Mealtimes were relaxed, unhurried and social experiences for children. Each play room had separate lunch time arrangements to help ensure a smooth transition time and allow children to eat when they wanted to. Meals were nutritious, appetising and plentiful and children were offered choices. Staff sat with children and chatted about their day and encouraged them to self-serve and eat independently. Younger children were well supported during mealtimes. Staff were well organised and they ensured children's experience was calm and unhurried. Children were taking part in the Childsmile toothbrushing programme. This meant that children were learning about healthy lifestyle choices.

### Quality indicator 1.3: Play and learning

Children were playing with their friends and having fun. They were leading their own play and learning through sensory experiences such as sand, water and play dough. They were 'cooking' in the home area and using real life resources such as pots, pans, ceramic dishes and wooden utensils. The art and craft areas were popular. Children were drawing, painting and exploring different textures to create their art work. This meant that children were developing their imaginative and creative skills.

Staff recognised the value of child-led play and facilitated this well. For example, the construction area in the big oaks room was extended to allow children more space and freedom to explore their interests. Children played cooperatively, shared their ideas and made decisions about what they wanted to build. This contributed to children's social and communication skills.

There was a good range of quality resources and play equipment for children to develop their skills. Children participated in a range of games and learning experiences such as a number hunt game, story time, sorting and matching games and singing action songs. The service celebrated world book day, and the children could tell us about their favourite stories. This helped children develop their skills in language, literacy and numeracy.

School aged children were having fun outdoors. They played together and engaged in energetic play such as, running, chasing each other and enjoying the benefits of outdoor play. They played indoors and performed 'Little Acorns' got talent'. They sang and danced while the 'judges' decided if they were going to press the golden buzzer. This meant that children were involved in play that was fun and meaningful to them.

Staff joined in with children's play and were having fun with them, responding to their interests and facilitating their play. Most staff used open-ended questions to help extend children's learning. We spoke with the service and suggested some strategies that would support staff to use more effective questioning skills. This will help challenge children's critical thinking skills and encourage them to problem solve.

There was a good balance of responsive and intentional learning experiences that reflected children's interests, stages of development and seasonal events. Staff used observations to inform children's learning and development. We spoke with the manager about ensuring all staff knew how to record observations that reflected children's learning and identified their developmental needs. This will help show children's progress over time.

The service used developmental milestones and trackers to help inform and plan children's next steps in their learning and development. We asked the service to continue streamlining the planning approach to ensure consistent practice across the service. This will help improve outcomes for children.

Children's voices were documented in the 'big books', which clearly demonstrated the service's commitment to involving children in their play and learning by gathering their views, opinions and experiences. This meant that children were meaningfully engaged in their learning and included in decision making.

## How good is our setting?

4 - Good

### Quality indicator 2.2: Children experience high quality facilities

The service was warm, welcoming and inclusive. The ethos was calm and the playrooms were furnished to a high standard with wooden furniture, hessian wall displays and plenty of natural resources. The service was safe and security measures were in place. Each child had an individual coat peg and shoebox for their personal belongings. This contributed to children's sense of belonging.

The spacious playrooms were well organised and set up for children to participate in a broad range of quality play experiences. Children could freely access resources and choose where they wanted to play. Their artwork was displayed and children's creations were acknowledged and celebrated. This sent a message that children mattered.

The service had made significant internal improvements to the building. Natural coloured flooring had been installed and the walls were freshly painted throughout making the rooms light and airy. The removal of the

privacy window film attracted more natural light and allowed children to look outside and see community activity.

Other improvements included a positive start to the development of the outdoor area. Children enjoyed the opportunity to play outdoors and benefitted from fresh air and exercise. The service identified further work to enhance the area to include play equipment and resources for all age groups.

There were some limitations in relation to the layout and flow of the play rooms and access to staff facilities, however the service made good use of the available space.

Infection prevention and control practices such as the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during personal care routines were observed. Children had access to sinks within the play rooms to wash their hands at key times, for example before mealtimes. This helped prevent the spread of infection and promoted good hygiene practices.

Children had access to their local community and regularly visited the nearby forest to enjoy nature walks and learn about different types of trees. Children showed us photographs of their visits to the forest during the seasons and talked about the leaves falling off the trees and collecting conkers. This meant that children were learning about the natural environment and the seasons.

**How good is our leadership?****4 - Good****Quality indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well**

The service recently updated the vision, values and aims in consultation with staff, families and children. Valuable feedback influenced the service's vision which was, 'To create a learning environment that is safe, secure, caring and inclusive so that children grow up to be capable, self-assured, resilient and responsible individuals'.

Staff role modelled the service's values and this was evident in their practice. They encouraged and reminded children to be kind and caring towards each other. Children were motivated by the kindness jar and they told us 'caring is sharing'. This helped create a positive ethos where everyone felt valued and included.

The service had started to gather the views of children to help improve the service. Children's voices were captured in the 'big books' which reflected their interests and ideas. We discussed how the service intended to continue to act on children's voices and suggestions. This will enable children to influence the service.

Families told us that they were meaningfully involved in the development of the service and the majority of families strongly agreed that they were happy with the care and support their children received. The service had identified strategies to further engage families in their children's learning. This will help improve outcomes for children.

The owner and manager of the service worked well together to improve the overall quality of the service. They had defined roles and responsibilities to ensure the smooth running of the service. They told us that they had undergone many changes in recent years and that they were on a journey of improvement. We acknowledged the improvements and could see the impact, for example, the ongoing development of the learning environment to support children's care, play and learning.

The manager led the staff team well and had made significant improvements to drive quality experiences and outcomes for children. The manager supported staff to reflect on their practice to ensure children experienced high quality care and learning. Staff were committed to improving the quality of the service and had made positive changes to their practice. This supported a culture of continuous improvement.

Quality assurance processes were in place. The manager had developed a monitoring system which meant that aspects of the service were routinely reviewed. The improvement plan was well documented and identified several areas for improvement. We spoke with the manager about simplifying the plan and scale it back to make it more achievable.

Self-evaluation processes were in the early stages of development. The management team were working towards streamlining practices across the service in consultation with staff. We asked the service to reflect on the past few years and consider focussing on specific priorities to inform the next improvement plan.

**How good is our staff team?****4 - Good**

## Quality indicator 4.3: Staff deployment

Staff were kind, calm and caring towards children in their care and we observed a consistent nurturing approach. They had developed positive relationships with children and were responsive to their individual care needs. We observed quality interactions between children and staff as they laughed together and had fun. Staff had a good understanding of children's right to play and this was evident in their practice. As a result, children were happy and progressing well.

The service was well staffed to support children's care, play and learning. Staff were deployed according to their skills and strengths. They told us their preferences and they understood the differing needs of the age groups and children's stages of development. Some staff worked across different age groups and this was seamless. This meant that children benefitted from an adaptable and flexible team.

The staff team was well established and committed to the quality of the service. There was good staff retention and team morale was high. Staff worked well together and supported each other to ensure children's needs were fully met through good communication and co-operation.

Training opportunities meant that staff were continuing to learn. For example, some staff had been trained on how to extend children's learning through effective questioning skills. To further support the quality of the service we asked the manager to ensure staff received ongoing training on child development, theory and practice to further develop their skills and knowledge. This will help improve the quality of the service.

Senior staff were responsible for ensuring day to day practice within the three playrooms was consistent and children's experiences were positive. They confidently role modelled best practice and led by example. They were part of the management team and were developing their leadership potential.

Staff told us they felt supported and valued by the management team and that their wellbeing was an important aspect of the service. They were motivated and their commitment and dedication to the service was a strength.

Positive relationships with families was evident during the inspection and children were clearly placed at the centre of the service. This meant that children and families benefitted from a passionate, enthusiastic and committed team.

## Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at [www.careinspectorate.com](http://www.careinspectorate.com).



## Detailed evaluations

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?	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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