

## Stramash Outdoor Nursery, Elgin Day Care of Children

Spynie Village Hall  
Spynie  
Elgin  
IV30 8XJ

Telephone: 01631 566 080

**Type of inspection:**  
Unannounced

**Completed on:**  
12 March 2025

**Service provided by:**  
Stramash Social Enterprise

**Service provider number:**  
SP2011011702

**Service no:**  
CS2014334483

## About the service

Stramash Outdoor Nursery, Elgin is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 42 children aged from two years to not yet attending primary school and to a maximum of 42 children aged from two years to seven years during school holiday time. Of those 42 children, no more than 10 can be aged two - three years at any one time.

Stramash Outdoor Nursery is located at Spynie village. The service operates from a large outdoor setting with several wooden cabins which provide warmth and shelter and an indoor space for the children to enjoy a range of different activities. The service operates throughout the year.

## About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Monday 10 March 2025 and Tuesday 11 March 2025 with feedback on Wednesday 12 March 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 attending the service.
- Reviewed completed parental questionnaires.
- Reviewed completed staff questionnaires.
- Spoke with staff and the managers.
- Observed practice and daily life.
- Reviewed documents.

## Key messages

- Children experienced warm, caring and nurturing support from staff.
- Children were happy, confident and actively involved in leading their play and learning.
- The managers and staff were committed to the ongoing development of the service.
- Positive relationships with families supported continuity of care and effective partnerships.
- Work was needed to increase the range of resources to extend children's play and learning.
- Quality assurance processes need to be embedded to secure sustained improvements across the service.

## 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?	3 - Adequate
How good is our setting?	3 - Adequate
How good is our leadership?	3 - Adequate
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?

## 3 - Adequate

We made an evaluation of adequate for this quality indicator, as several important strengths taken together just outweighed areas for improvement.

### Quality indicator 1.1 Nurturing care and support

Overall, children were happy, settled and enjoyed their time in the nursery. Natural friendships had formed between children and they were caring and inclusive in their play with each other. Positive attachments had been formed between staff and the children which contributed to them developing a sense of belonging. Children knew the routines and most approached staff with confidence to seek support. Staff communicated with children down at their level in a gentle and sensitive manner. For the majority of the time, we observed staff being nurturing, providing comfort, reassurance, cuddles and warmth to children when required. However, there were also a couple of occasions where, due to staff's positioning within the setting, they did not see children who would have benefitted from some support and reassurance.

Working in partnership with families and having open communication was a priority for the managers and staff. Establishing good working relationships with parents supports consistency and continuity of care for children. There was daily communication with families at drop off and collection time. Good use was also made of an online app as well as families being invited to spend time in the nursery. Parents were generally positive about the level of information they received at collection time although some parents would appreciate more information specific to their child's progression and next steps. Comments made included:

'Great key workers and it is so lovely coming into the nursery and chatting to everyone who is excited to tell you about your child's day. Keyworker replies to emails on the same day and very supportive with developmental milestones'.

'There are many opportunities to comment and feedback via blossom and in person. They care about our opinions and those of my child in all areas from snack to drop off to nursery development'.

'Usually very little individual / specific info given on play and learning in person or on Blossom beyond a narrative of what mostly groups of children had been doing, and although we love to see photos we are keen to know how our child is progressing and developing in the setting'.

'I think in general staff are great, they are welcoming and open to conversation if they have time. I feel I can have open honest conversations with most of the staff'.

'I would like a bit more feedback on my child's learning and development'.

Most staff were able to confidently discuss the care and support needs for the majority of the children in their care. We looked at the personal plans for a number of children. They did not always clearly highlight any specific needs a child might have and the strategies required to meet these. As a consequence, not all staff were aware of the strategies to support the children and therefore consistent care and support was not being provided to progress and achieve their potential. The managers should ensure that personal plans are regularly reviewed and updated with the most current targets, support strategies and next steps so that children receive consistent care that is right for them.

Medication was stored safely and was easy for staff to access. However, an effective system to audit medication was not in place. As a result some medication was out of date and there was no clear record of what medication was held in the service. The lack of effective systems had the potential to result in significant harm. (See requirement 1)

Children's experiences during lunch and snack times was an area for improvement already identified by the managers and staff. We observed relaxed, sociable and unhurried snack and lunchtimes. Staff were aware of children's allergies and dietary requirements, and carefully catered for these. Children were supported to develop important independence skills when pouring drinks and self serving snack and lunch. Staff offered support to those children who required it. They sat with the children which provided opportunities to form and maintain relationships, and support language and communication skills. We highlighted that the table and seating used was not of a suitable height for the majority of children to comfortably sit and eat their meals. We also discussed with the managers that they should give consideration as to how they could increase the number of children who could be served lunch at the same time so that no children were having to wait an unreasonable amount of time to get their meal.

Children's safety and emotional wellbeing were supported through the arrangements which were in place for sleep routines. One of the cabins was used for children who required a sleep. There were appropriate sleep mats and sleeping children were well supervised by a member of staff. However, the environment could be improved to make it feel more homely, cosy and welcoming.

### Quality indicator 1.3 Play and learning

Most children were happy and busy. Many had made good friendships and enjoyed playing and laughing together. Children were involved in leading their own play and learning through a range of planned and spontaneous experiences. For the majority of the time children benefitted from uninterrupted play, allowing them to become absorbed and have fun. This increased children's happiness and engagement. We observed children enjoying activities such as sensory play with water or sand and painting. Comments from children included:

'I love all my nursery teachers. I like playing. I love the swing, I can do it myself now'.

'Because it's outsidey and outdoorsy. Because I see my friends a lot'.

We observed children who were having fun and were engaged in their play. We also saw some examples of staff effectively extending and building on children's play and learning. Staff encouraged children to think independently and to reflect. However, we identified missed opportunities when skilled interactions and effective questioning could have further extended children's curiosity, problem-solving skills, and promote development of imagination. We discussed with the managers the option of more experienced staff modelling skilled interactions and good practice to support less confident staff to develop the appropriate skills and knowledge which would promote positive outcomes for children. One parent commented:

'I like that my child can play in an outside setting all day. I love that he has the opportunity to play with mud, dig holes, create and build things which are directed by his own ideas. I really like that the staff are there to facilitate play and ensure safety and to stand back and allow the children to shape their play organically'.

Planning for children's learning, tracking and monitoring their progress was an area which the service had focussed on as an area for improvement. Although the various changes of management had slowed progress, we were able to see a positive impact on outcomes for children.

Staff had received training and support from the local authority and were more confident in monitoring and tracking children's progress and using this to feed into planning.

We looked at the observations completed for several children and identified that there had been some improvements in the quality and content of observations.

Some areas of the nursery would benefit from additional quality resources to encourage imaginative play, spark curiosity and increase the opportunities for children to extend and consolidate their learning through play. The lower outdoor area in particular was poorly resourced and in need of some immediate attention. The managers acknowledged that work was needed to develop this area. Literacy and numeracy opportunities could also be developed further across the nursery. For example, encouraging children's use of books, helping children to expand their vocabulary, having access to math materials and activities and supporting children's understanding of written numbers. The managers and staff should review the current space and resources and develop play and learning opportunities available each day by focusing on children's interest, provocations, and experiences that spark children's curiosities. (See area for improvement 1)

## Requirements

1. By 30 May 2025, to ensure children's medication needs are met and children are safe, the provider must ensure that medication is safely managed and is in line with best practice guidance.

In order to comply the provider must, at a minimum ensure:

- a) Accurate and up to date records are maintained of all medications on the premises for the children's use including details of when medications are returned to parents/carers.
- b) For all children requiring medications, all necessary information is recorded and is available to staff upon the child's admission to the service or when the condition first becomes known.
- c) Staff must have a demonstrable understanding of the appropriate procedures to follow to ensure the safe administration of medication including the need for accurate, legible record keeping.
- d) There is a robust auditing system of all medication held.

This is to comply with Regulation 4 (1)(a) - requirement to make proper provision for the health and welfare of service users - of The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/210).

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I experience high quality care and support because people have the necessary information and resources' (4.27).

This is to ensure care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards, which state that: 'Any treatment or intervention that I experience is safe and effective' (HSCS 1.24).

## Areas for improvement

1. To promote children's continued learning, development and enjoyment, children should have access to a wide range of resources and experiences which are challenging and suitable to their individual interests and stages of development. There should be a sufficient amount of resources both indoors and outdoors to enable children to make independent choices and engage in deep and meaningful play.

Language, literacy and numeracy should be fully embedded across all areas of the setting.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state that: 'As a child, I can direct my own play and activities in the way that I choose, and freely access a wide range of experiences and resources suitable for my age and stage, which stimulate my natural curiosity, learning and creativity' (HSCS 2.27).

## How good is our setting?

## 3 - Adequate

We made an evaluation of adequate for this quality indicator, as several important strengths taken together just outweighed areas for improvement.

### Quality Indicator 2.2 Children experience high quality facilities.

Stramash Outdoor Nursery Elgin was a fully outdoor service, which offered children a large natural environment where they could be adventurous, explore, be independent and develop a range of physical skills in calm and peaceful surroundings. There were also several wooden cabins which were used at snack and lunch time, provided toilet and nappy changing facilities, were used for sleeping children and offered shelter for children during poor weather.

The size and layout of the setting created some difficulties in relation to staff deployment and staff being able to adequately supervise all the children if they were in different areas across the grounds. There were several blind spots to the rear of the cabins. All staff had walkie talkies and regular headcounts were completed to ensure all children were accounted for. The managers recognised that further remedial work was needed reduce the potential risks to children's safety across the whole setting.

The large outdoor area to the rear of the cabins offered children the space to explore and engage with a range of loose parts and open-ended resources. However, at the time of the inspection, inclement weather had been forecast and the children were restricted to the lower outdoor area next to the cabins. This space was uninviting and in need of attention. There were only limited loose parts which children could freely access to extend their play and learning and only limited play experiences to promote early language, literacy and numeracy skills. Work was needed to develop the outdoor area to ensure that it was a safe, interesting and exciting area for the children. The managers and staff had identified the need to expand the learning opportunities outdoors as a priority. We discussed ways in which the outdoor area could be further developed to promote multi-sensory outdoor play as well as stimulating children's natural curiosity. (See area for improvement 1 under Quality theme 1 - How good is our care, play and learning)

The service had appropriate infection control procedures in place to support a safe environment and the health and wellbeing of the children and staff. During food preparation and serving, staff followed best practice guidance and carried out effective cleaning of tables before and after children ate. Children were supported when hand washing at appropriate times throughout the day. This contributed to minimising the potential spread of infection for both the staff and children. The managers acknowledged that the handwashing facilities within the dining cabin needed to be improved to allow all the children to comfortably wash their hands under running water.

Effective arrangements were in place to ensure children and families' personal information was stored securely.

The majority of information was stored electronically and any paperwork was stored securely within locked cupboards. This ensured confidentiality was maintained and complied with best practice guidance.

## How good is our leadership?

### 3 - Adequate

We made an evaluation of adequate for this quality indicator, as several important strengths taken together just outweighed areas for improvement.

#### Quality indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well

There had been a number of changes of management over the previous two years which had been unsettling for both the staff team and the families. The two new managers had only been appointed the week prior to the inspection however they were both existing staff members and had a clear knowledge and understanding of the service, what was working well and what areas needed to be improved.

The managers and staff fully engaged with the inspection process, demonstrating a positive ethos and culture of continuous improvement. There was a clear vision for the service which resulted in a positive working environment, where staff felt confident to share ideas to initiate change and were encouraged to share the responsibilities. The managers and staff demonstrated their commitment to the service and were motivated to make improvements to ensure positive outcomes for the children.

Supporting all relevant stakeholders to be meaningfully involved and influence change was a priority for the new managers. They promoted a positive attitude to change and recognised the importance of including all relevant stakeholders in developing a shared vision to secure quality outcomes for the children. For example, the recent review of the vision, values and aims of the nursery had included the children, families and staff.

Parents were made to feel welcome, were encouraged to spend time in the nursery and be actively involved in its development. On a daily basis, there was opportunity for informal information sharing with parents during drop off and pick up times. Good use was also made of an online app, surveys, parents evenings, open days and themed days to encourage parental engagement. Parents welcomed these opportunities to feel part of the nursery. Comments made included:

'Opinions and feedback are sought through the app or email. This has become more frequent over recent months which is great. There have been a few open days/events where we can get involved in things and feel included in the development of the nursery as well as build relationships with the team'.

'We are always invited along to themed days'.

'Feedback and input is welcomed and sought after regularly. Suggestions are welcome and implemented where appropriate'.

Staff were actively encouraged to contribute and be involved in the self evaluation process. There were regular team meetings where staff were supported to reflect on the service provided, evaluate learning opportunities and resources available. They could also informally share any feedback or suggestions they might have about the service on the staff online chat group or while the managers worked alongside them.

There were systems of quality assurance to ensure that the quality of the service was monitored and assessed in a focussed and meaningful way. There was an improvement plan in place with identified action points which the managers and staff were focussed on meeting.

However, these systems were not yet fully embedded and leading to continuous improvement and positive change to outcomes for children and families.

## 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.

### Quality Indicator 4.3 Staff deployment

Staff were welcoming and engaged in the inspection process. They were responsive to suggestions and showed a commitment to making improvements to support good outcomes for children.

Children benefitted from a happy, caring and motivated staff team who knew them well and were committed to providing good quality care and support. Staff were warm and nurturing in their approach which promoted a happy and secure environment for children where children could play and have fun. 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.

Staff had established good working relationships with parents. Families were kept informed about the nursery through daily conversations at drop off and collection times, via an online app and there were regular opportunities for parents to spend time in the nursery. Having good communication with families contributed to parents feeling included in their child's experiences at nursery and assisted staff when identifying how best to meet children's needs. A number of parents who provided feedback commented positively about the relationship they and their children had with the staff team. Comments made included:

'The staff really care for the children, my daughter feels safe and comfortable and knows that she will be comforted if she is upset. Her keyworker is amazing and has really taken her time to get to know her as a person and talks to me almost every day about her and what she has been up to'.

'He has a great bond with staff, they are ready to act if he needs more support or care'.

'The staff really understand him, they address and accommodate his individual needs with care and kindness'.

'Stramash are great at asking for feedback and are flexible to make changes'.

Staff worked well together as a team and their differing skills and knowledge complimented one another and resulted in quality interactions with children. Deployment of staff across the setting and throughout the day supported children to lead their play and engage in free flow opportunities whilst remaining safe. However, there were occasions where staff were task orientated and not always aware of their positioning in relation to supporting interactions, experiences and outcomes.

## 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?	3 - Adequate
1.1 Nurturing care and support	3 - Adequate
1.3 Play and learning	3 - Adequate
How good is our setting?	3 - Adequate
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	3 - Adequate
How good is our leadership?	3 - Adequate
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	3 - Adequate
How good is our staff team?	4 - Good
4.3 Staff deployment	4 - Good

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