

Stewart, Shona C

Child Minding

Auchterarder

Type of inspection:
Announced (short notice)

Completed on:
5 May 2025

Service provided by:
Shona Stewart

Service provider number:
SP2004937382

Service no:
CS2004081599

About the service

Shona Stewart provides a childminding service from her family farm close to the village of Blackford, Perthshire. The childminder is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of six children at any one time under the age of 12 years.

The children are cared for on the ground floor of the farmhouse. They have access to a large kitchen dining area, a toy room, and a toilet. The children also have access to a large garden to the side of the property. Children have opportunities to spend time with the childminder on the farm.

About the inspection

This was a short-announced inspection which took place on 05 May 2025 between 11:30 and 14:30. 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 registration and complaints information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered throughout the inspection year.

To inform our evaluations we:

- spoke with two children using the service
- received and reviewed three completed questionnaires from children's relatives and carers
- spoke with the provider
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Children and families had developed trusting and positive relationships with the childminder.
- Children were fully engaged in their play and empowered by the childminder to lead their own play and learning.
- We suggested the childminder enhance natural materials, real life experiences and loose parts within the indoor environment. This would help promote children's curiosity, problem solving skills and imaginative play further.
- There were no systems in place to monitor and evaluate children's progress and achievements.
- Self-evaluation and reflection should be undertaken to assess what is working well in the service and what needs to improve.
- A strength of the service was the children's involvement within their local area which deepened their connections to their local and wider communities.
- The childminder should now undertake risk assessments, record any hazards identified and put control measures in place to help keep children safe.
- Policies and procedures did not fully underpin the service being provided.

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?	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?

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 1.1 Nurturing care and support

Children experienced kind, caring and respectful interactions from the childminder. The childminder promoted manners and kindness which was reciprocated by the children who were polite and well mannered. Children had developed trusting and positive relationships with the childminder and were confident to seek support when needed. The childminder responded with reassurance and warmth which contributed to the children's wellbeing and happiness.

The childminder knew the children and their families very well. Most children had a personal plan in place which held current information through consultation with families. This ensured children's current health, well-being and developmental needs were supported appropriately by the childminder. The childminder recognised they did not have current information for one child; however they had cared for them for many years, and we were confident this information would be updated. Families that responded to our questionnaire told us, 'She is exceptional with our child. She supports anything that we are trying to do and nurtures our child. She goes above and beyond to give them a great day!' and 'Honestly, Shona always goes the extra mile - I couldn't think of anything else she could do to make it better. My children very much enjoy their time with Shona'.

Children played cooperatively together for most of the time during the inspection. The childminder resolved minor disputes sensitively, and calmly. This contributed to children feeling valued and included.

Children experienced mealtimes that were sociable and unhurried. The childminder made the children's sandwiches and then they sat together at the kitchen table. This meant they experienced a relaxed atmosphere in which to eat and drink. At the previous inspection we asked the childminder to consider ways in which children could learn more independence and responsibility through their mealtime experience. For example, preparing their own sandwiches, pouring their own drinks, and using real plates. During our discussion, a child asked for another sandwich and the childminder empowered them to independently make their own. We encouraged the childminder to continue to offer children these opportunities which would support them to learn important life skills. The childminder had registered as a food business and allergies were well managed.

At the time of the inspection no children required medication. We viewed the relevant medication forms. We were confident that children's health and wellbeing needs would be met as systems were in place for the safe storage and administration of medication. The childminder could confidently tell us how they would share initial concerns on children's wellbeing and welfare. This contributed to keeping children safe from harm.

Quality indicator 1.3. Play and learning

The childminder had an informal approach to planning activities for the children. Children were asked what they would like to do and were actively involved in their play throughout the inspection.

While playing children asked the childminder for resources to enhance their experiences. The childminder was responsive to their suggestions which meant children were leading their own play and learning.

Children were observed to be happy and enjoyed their time with the childminder. They were offered experiences that captured their interests. For example, children were learning to crochet, knit and participated in science experiments. On the day of inspection children were in the garden and had been planting beans and potatoes. They told us, 'We put them in wet soil to grow.' We saw they hoisted a toy tractor onto a swing and were using real tools to fix it. They told us, 'We're being mechanics and using a spanner.' As a result, children were fully engaged in their play.

The childminder used an online platform to share children's experiences with families which contributed to them feeling included in their child's day. We found these were descriptions of activities and experiences and asked the childminder to consider sharing what the children were learning during their play. This area of practice had been highlighted at the previous inspection. Further information can be found in section 'What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection'.

A strength of the service was children's involvement within their local area. For example, they participated in pancake making and community lunches at the church. They took part in a local agricultural show and children excitedly told us, 'I came third' and 'I have four rosettes now.' Additionally, they visited the local toddler groups and park. These experiences helped children develop and deepen connections with their local and wider communities.

How good is our setting?

3 - Adequate

We evaluated this key question as adequate, where strengths only just outweighed weaknesses.

Quality indicator 2.2. Children experience high quality facilities

Children were cared for in a welcoming environment. They moved confidently between the kitchen and toy room where they spent most of their time if not outside in the large garden. The kitchen was spacious, and the Aga cooker was surrounded by a guard which helped keep children safe. The large kitchen table was used for arts and craft activities, baking, and mealtimes. We saw children could choose arts and craft resources from a unit which provided them with choice. They drew pictures, made cards, and enjoyed telling us jokes. Children were settled, confident and having fun while at the childminders home. Children told us, 'I don't want Shona's house to change' and 'It's fun here, Shona is nice'.

Children played in a toy room which contained, a variety of books and games which supported children's language, literacy, and numeracy skills. Children played with a wooden kitchen and a range of plastic toys. At the previous inspection we highlighted that a provision of quality resources, for example, loose parts and real life experiences could be introduced to the resources within the toy room. While we acknowledged the garden contained these resources, there was scope to improve this provision of quality resources within the indoor environment. This would help promote children's curiosity, problem solving skills and imaginative play further.

Children had adequate space to play on the floor of the toy room. Older children could relax and rest on soft furnishings in the sitting room. This meant they could have some quiet and alone time after their day at school.

The childminder told us they visually checked the house and garden before the arrival of the children. There were no formal systems in place to evidence that risks to children's safety had been considered when at the childminders home or out in the community. For example, children enjoyed learning about and visiting the farm animals. They went on trips to the village and local park and we had some concerns around the security at one end of the garden. The height of the garden gate, separating the garden and a neighbouring field was low. We suggested ways in which the gate could be adapted to prevent children from climbing it. The childminder should now undertake and implement risk assessments to record any hazards identified and put control measures in place to help keep children safe (see area for improvement 1).

To support the childminder, we signposted our 'Keeping children safe - look, think, act campaign' (SIMOA). Families valued their children's outdoor experiences and told us, 'Children are always outside when the weather is good. From playing games, planting flowers, playing with other children' and 'Our child has weathered cheeks because they are outdoors so often. We love that aspect of Shona's care'.

Children were kept healthy as infection prevention and control measures were in place. For example, children washed their hands at the appropriate times and used disposable tissues to dry their hands. They changed into indoor shoes after visiting the farm animals and playing in the garden. These approaches helped minimise the potential spread of infection and kept children healthy.

The childminder understood their responsibility in keeping children and family's personal information confidential. Since the previous inspection they had become a member of the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). This meant they stored documents and digital images securely and used social media safely in agreement with families.

Areas for improvement

1. To keep children safe, and identify and remove any risks to children, the provider should develop and implement risk assessments for specific areas of the setting. Risk assessments should be reviewed regularly.

This should include, but is not limited to:

- a) for the areas of the home the children access
- b) for outings
- c) for the garden including gates that children could climb over into neighbouring fields.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'My environment is secure and safe' (HSCS 5.19).

How good is our leadership?

3 - Adequate

We evaluated this key question as adequate, where strengths only just outweighed weaknesses.

Quality indicator 3.1. Quality assurance and improvement are led well

The Vision values and aims of the service had been reviewed through consultation with children. We saw the childminder was meeting her objectives through the fun and kind interactions we observed throughout the inspection.

The childminder recognised the importance of involving children and families in the development of the service. They had used formal questionnaires and informal chats to gather their views. This meant children and families felt valued and included.

We highlighted to the childminder, using open ended questions within their questionnaires would help them gather informative information to help support them with their improvement planning.

At the previous inspection we asked the childminder to further develop their self-evaluation processes by reading current frameworks and best practice publications to help them plan for improvement. Some progress had been made, however, the pace of change to improve the quality of care and support and overall outcomes for children and their families was slow. Further information can be found in section 'What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection.'

During the previous two inspections we have asked the childminder to review and update their policies and procedures in line with relevant best practice documents. Additionally, we asked that they implement a missing child policy and procedure. This would ensure clear procedures are in place to contact the relevant people and enable the appropriate action to be taken if needed to keep children safe. Further information can be found in section; 'What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection.'

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 4.1. Staff skills, values, and knowledge

The childminder's responsive and caring approach supported children's wellbeing. The childminder knew the children in her care well and offered support in an individualised way. Friendly, fun, and warm interactions meant children felt happy and secure.

The childminder held a professional childcare qualification and was considering embarking on a higher level course. They had many years' experience of childminding and managing the local playgroup. The childminder had completed mandatory training which helped assist them to extend their knowledge and improve in some areas of their practice. For example, first aid and child protection training enabled the childminder to support children's health, wellbeing, and safety. We encouraged the childminder to continue to pursue further professional training. Engaging in professional reading and research would support them with making positive changes within the service and improving outcomes for children and families. The childminder could record how learning had improved practice.

During the inspection, the childminder engaged well with us and was honest that paperwork was not one of her strengths. The childminder told us they had not been able to dedicate sufficient time to the development of the service due to other commitments. We discussed the childminder's areas for improvement and how these could be monitored and progress recorded. We signposted The Hub on our website for current guidance and bite sized sessions on self-evaluation to assist the childminder with improving outcomes.

What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection

Areas for improvement

Previous area for improvement 1

To support children's progression in their learning and development, observations should be regularly recorded, and identify children's progress in their learning. Next steps in children's development should be meaningful, achievable, and monitored to ensure children are supported well to reach their full potential.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I am supported to achieve my potential in education and employment if this is right for me' (HSCS 1.27).

This area for improvement was made on 15 May 2024.

Action taken since then

The childminder sent photographs of children participating in activities and experiences. For younger children attending the service there were no formal observations or next steps in development in place. We discussed older children could identify a skill they would like to learn and the childminder could monitor their progress and share successes with families as part of their personal plan.

This area for improvement has not been met and will remain within this report.

Previous area for improvement 2

To improve outcomes for children, self-evaluation should be developed. The childminder should become familiar with best practice guidance and use this to support her to reflect and plan for continuous improvement, including gathering the views of families.

This is to ensure care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state; 'I have confidence in people because they are trained, competent and skilled, are able to reflect on their practice and follow their professional and organisational codes' (HSCS 3.14).

This area for improvement was made on 15 May 2024.

Action taken since then

The childminder had sent out a questionnaire to families and gathered information on activities children would like to experience. The childminder had undertaken some reading and research. Expectations in relation to children's care and support in early learning and childcare are set out in the Health and Social Care Standards and the Care Inspectorate's: A quality framework for daycare of children, childminding, and school-aged childcare. These provide robust frameworks to support reflection and continuous improvement for childminder settings. We asked the childminder to consider these documents and the areas for improvement identified within this report as a tool to formalise self-evaluation in the service showing what is working well and what needs to improve.

This area for improvement has not been met and will remain within this report.

Previous area for improvement 3

The childminder should implement policies and procedures, which ensure that children are cared for in a safe and appropriate setting. New policies and procedures should be shared with parents.

This is to ensure care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state that, "I use a service and organisation which are well led and managed". (HSCS 4.23).

This area for improvement was made on 17 April 2019

This area for improvement was made on 15 May 2024.

Action taken since then

The childminder had reviewed their policies and procedures since the previous inspection and created a new welcome booklet for families containing the reviewed documents. We found that some aspects of the service provided would still benefit from a policy and procedure to support practice. For example, there was no information for families on how to make a complaint and the process should one be made. There was no information to support healthy eating, and limited information on how children were learning positive and safe behaviours around the animals on the farm. We asked the childminder to develop a missing child policy and procedure.

We asked the childminder to continue to develop a range of policies and procedures to fully underpin the service they were providing. Additionally, this will provide clear information to families on what to expect from the running of the service.

This area for improvement has not been met and will remain within this report.

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?	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
4.1 Staff skills, knowledge and values	4 - Good

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