

Willow Den at Spartans Day Care of Children

Ainslie Park Stadium
94 Pilton Drive
Edinburgh
EH5 2HF

Telephone: 07983526953

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
28 November 2024

Service provided by:
Willow Den Scotland Ltd

Service provider number:
SP2021000236

Service no:
CS2021000369

About the service

Willow Den at Spartans is registered to provide care for up to 18 children aged three years to those not yet attending primary school. The setting is a fully outdoor nursery and is based in the grounds of Ainslie Park Stadium, Edinburgh. The setting is close to shops, transport links and other amenities.

Children are cared for outdoors in the main enclosed play space referred to as base camp, and have access to the adjoining woodland area. Children have access to outdoor toilets and eating spaces in base camp. Contingency space can be accessed indoors in the event of adverse weather conditions.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Monday 25 November 2024 between 10:45 and 16:00. We returned to complete the inspection on Tuesday 26 November 2024 between 09:30 and 15:20. 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 information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since registering. In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with children using the service, two parents and took into account feedback from 16 families
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice and daily experiences of children
- reviewed documents relating to children's care and the management of the service.

Feedback was given to the manager, depute manager and provider via an online call on 28 November 2024.

Key messages

Children were respected and nurtured as individuals. Their needs and wishes were generally known by staff who responded sensitively.

Children had a good range of opportunities to develop their physical skills, resilience and strength in a natural environment.

To fully support children's achievements in all areas of development, improvements are needed in the environment and the planning for children's learning. Both aspects have been identified by management and are being progressed.

Children benefit from a staff team who are committed to outdoor learning and who are driven to improve outcomes for children.

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.

Quality indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support

Children were nurtured and supported through their daily experiences. Warm welcomes by familiar and consistent staff was reassuring for children and gave a sense of security and consistency. Parents were grateful for the small setting and the level of care their children received. Most interactions were strengths-based and so children felt valued and respected. A parent said, "The staff are incredibly supportive, approachable, and skilled at fostering my child's curiosity and confidence".

Children were involved in deciding their daily care routines. For example, permissions were sought by staff before personal care was carried out and so play was not interrupted. This responsive approach meant that children were respected as the lead in their own care. Children's privacy and dignity were protected during personal care. However, staff should consider how they could enable children to be more independent during these times.

Mealtimes were a natural gathering time where most children and staff came together. Children had some opportunities to learn and practice social responsibilities and self-care skills. For example, clearing away their own dishes and self-serving their own food. Staff sat with children during mealtimes which meant the risks associated with choking were reduced. However, there was a time when children were observed eating by themselves, out with mealtimes. This posed a risk of choking going unnoticed. To further enhance mealtimes, children should receive consistent messages from all staff about their independence; and the flow of mealtimes should be reviewed to reduce waiting times for children. In addition, the learning opportunities during mealtimes should be enhanced to extend children's range of skills and knowledge. For example, washing dishes and preparing a variety of food.

Children's individual wellbeing benefited from good use of personal planning. A range of information was gathered about children to inform staff of their needs and wishes. Staff worked alongside parents and other agencies to ensure consistent support for children. As a result, children had their needs and wishes considered and used in the planning and provision of their care. A parent said, "This collaborative approach gave me confidence that my child's individual needs and preferences were fully understood and would be met". Moving forward, the plans should be consistently reviewed and updated with parents. Children's progress in their care needs should be monitored to ensure support strategies are effective. In addition, the safeguarding policy should be reviewed to guide staff in seeking the right support when needed. These improvements would ensure information is up to date and relevant for each child to reach their full potential.

Medication was stored according to best practice. This meant it was safe and accessible for staff when children needed it. However, all children should have a medical plan showing a stepped approach to keeping them healthy, including food intolerances. This would provide a clear guide of actions for staff to undertake when a child's health need has affected them. All health needs should be reviewed with parents consistently at least every term to ensure information is correct. Management understood the improvements needed to ensure the effective management of health needs and medication.

Quality indicator 1.3: Play and learning

Children had fun as they experienced play, learning and development opportunities. They were very active throughout the inspection, showing curiosity and interest in what was going on around them. Children confidently asked for help and activities when needed and staff responded to these. They generally led the pace of the day. There was lots of laughter and chatter as children mostly took responsibility for their own and each other's safety as well as reminding others of the expectations in the service. For example, children used timers for taking turns and gave each other reminders of the nursery safety boundaries. Parents appreciated the variety of opportunities, with one saying, "Building, mud play, wood work, blackberry picking and cooking. Swings, climbing, football. I'm very impressed with the variety of activities provided and the creativity of the staff".

Daily routines, tasks and the natural environment were opportunities for children to learn about problem solving, assessing risk, being resilient with challenges and predicting then managing change. For example, the changing weather, transporting supplies into the base camp and discovering something new in their environment. A parent appreciated how the service offered their child opportunities outside of their comfort zone. Most of the time, staff practice was mindful and appropriately paced so children could discuss, explore, observe and hypothesise about things. However, at times practicalities of the environment impacted on children's experience. For example, staff having to leave base camp to get resources while children waited and there was no art paper available due to the wind. The team should consider how to manage these types of situations to enable a more responsive approach to children's interests in the moment.

Opportunities to develop literacy were varied and consistent. There were constant conversations, the modelling of new vocabulary, recalling of experiences and knowledge, stories and songs. Core staff were skilled at enabling children to describe, question, experiment and problem solve. As a result, children's literacy skills were being enhanced. The team should now consider how numeracy concepts are incorporated into play and interactions, to develop children's knowledge and understanding. For example, measuring, weighing, counting, sequencing, recognising and writing numbers.

Children mostly engaged with staff throughout their play. There was limited extended play observed during inspection, where children were absorbed in their experience. Examples of this were imaginative play with each other and physical play with large movement skills. This meant that staff were an important resource for learning alongside the environment. Management were aware of this and were working to enhance staff skills and knowledge in outdoor learning. In addition, improvements to the environment would support children's extended engagement in play. A parent highlighted this, saying "It's clear a lot of care already goes into choosing resources, and something like a few extra props for imaginative play or seasonal activities could add even more fun to an already amazing experience".

Children's interests and requests were informing plans each day. Their voices were heard and staff were responsive. The tracking of children's progress and how this informed planning continued to develop and be embedded. Gaps in this process had been identified by management and action was being taken. This would ensure children continue to thrive in their play and learning.

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.

Quality indicator 2.2: Children experience high quality facilities

The setting was welcoming for children. There were spaces for their belongings and their photographs were displayed around the areas. The outdoor setting offered changing daylight and varying weather for children to understand and manage. Tarpaulins were used to provide some shelter from the elements. While there were places for children to be comfortable such as a sofa, hammock and ground cushions, these were not cosy spaces for children. The team should provide spaces for children to get respite from the weather or the group when they choose. For example, tents with sleeping bags which are inviting and comfortable for children.

The setting and equipment were generally safe and secure. Learning had taken place from recent incidents and actions were taken to enhance children's security. For example, the natural boundaries had been heightened around the woodland area, while children and staff had visual reminders to be vigilant with each other. Children were involved in assessing risks daily and so they were knowledgeable about the boundaries. Staff did headcounts and practiced the gathering call with children.

Some infection prevention and control measures were in place, such as cleaning the table for meals and handwashing before food and after personal care. To further reduce the risk of infection spread, the team should enhance prevention methods, including handwashing following nose-wiping.

The environments used by children were developmentally appropriate spaces. The base camp offered some defined areas such as the canteen, mud kitchen, creative area, woodwork area and a book area. The woodland space offered opportunities for children to be active and develop strength, resilience and respect for the natural environment. A small semi-indoor area was separate from the base camp and children could not access this independently. It was however a contingency space for adverse weather conditions and was not intended for extended use during each session.

Recent changes to the environment meant that toys had been removed from the setting, so children could focus on nature based learning. This was still in the early stages. Children and staff should have a range of resources and tools to engage in all types of play. Management should ensure this while nature-based learning continues to develop and embed into practice. Children's outcomes would also be enhanced with improvements to the environment. Examples of this were: regular setting and maintaining of spaces to ensure they are inviting and offer depth of opportunity; continuous provision of sensory materials such as clay, for creativity and self-regulation; and the provision of tools and resources in response to children's interests to add skill, depth and value to their play. For example, a woodwork area was available but had no tools for children to access freely.

Children also had experiences and opportunities outside of the nursery, in the local community. These offered variety, new opportunities and links to their local area. For example, growing vegetables in community gardens, football sessions on their grounds and trips to the local botanic gardens.

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.

Quality indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvements are led well

New management and a significant change in team members meant the service had been in a transition period over the past six months. The service vision was revisited with children, staff and parents to reach a

common ethos and plan for moving forward. A stronger focus on nature-based learning had brought some changes to the environment and staff practice. It was continuing to develop and embed. This was valued by parents, with one saying, "I love the teams ethos that is based on outdoor learning. They inspire my child to be in the outdoors even at home". Another parent felt they would benefit from workshops to better understand how nature-based learning could be supported at home.

A commitment to building and maintaining relationships with families was evident. As a result, parents had a variety of opportunities to offer feedback to inform change. Parents were welcomed into the setting each day so they could see their children at play. In addition, various surveys, questionnaires and open days were available. These were essential for staff to build connections with families and for parents to feel that their feedback was valued. Parents said, "I always feel welcome, questions are answered and issues addressed or investigated with feedback" and "It's clear that they value partnership with parents and are committed to ensuring every child thrives".

Quality assurance processes were developing but were not yet fully leading to continuous improvement. Some audits were in place such as daily safety checks to minimise risks for children. However, most quality assurance was carried out informally through discussions with staff and manager walk-rounds. This meant that some issues with quality were being missed. For example, some play spaces would benefit from extended observations to assess how children use them and explore how they could be inspired within those spaces. Furthermore, the quality assurance of legislative requirements such as personal planning, should ensure that information about children is relevant, current and effective for their support. Management were aware of the need to formalise these processes to identify areas for development and plan for improvements. We also advised the use of best practice guidance to benchmark against and for gaining ideas. For example, 'Out to Play' (Scottish Government 2020).

The service improvement plan demonstrated the teams ability to reflect on the service and make improvements. Further training had been planned to support staff in continuing their professional journey. It was evident that commitment and motivation was high in the team. This would help strengthen their capacity for improving 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.

Quality indicator 4.3: Staff deployment

The level of staffing was generally effective in ensuring good quality outcomes for children. Management demonstrated a commitment to ensure the staffing was right to meet the needs of children. Contingency plans were in place to ensure the right number of staff were present. This was being further developed to include ensuring consistent care and learning for keygroup children during staff absences.

The core team were qualified, knowledgeable and committed staff. Their varying skills and experience offered children a range of opportunities and knowledge to tap into. Staff were starting to take the lead on developing areas of provision according to their interests and knowledge. This was a motivating factor for staff and will enable them to continue sharing their expertise with children.

Organisational bank staff were used regularly and were known to staff and children. Agency staff were used sparingly, and the same people were requested for continuity of care for children. During inspection, these

staff used their initiative to work as part of the team, engaging in a familiar way with children and supporting staff with practical tasks. As covering staff formed half of the team at points during a week, management should further ensure children are benefiting from them being present. For example, individual support strategies for children should be consistently used; health and medication needs of children should be known and used to keep them healthy; and the ethos of the service should be consistently promoted with children. Covering staff should also know how to safeguard children according to the service child protection policy. Developing the knowledge and understanding of covering staff would ensure that they are informed and equipped to manage situations as they arise to keep children safe and well.

The setting space was long and narrow, requiring effective staff deployment to ensure children's safety and quality of experience. Staff were vigilant of children's movements and were flexible to support each other as a team. However, there were times when staff movement was less organised. For example, staff were moving around doing tasks rather than being stationed within an area. As a result, some children were not supported in a way which was best for them. Management should explore how to deploy staff effectively to ensure children know where they can find staff when needed.

Staff felt happy in work and were supported by each other and management. Their wellbeing was nurtured through daily self-care supplies being available, having a warm place to rest during the day and regular breaks or when needed. This enabled them to be refreshed and focused for their time with children.

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

To find out more

This inspection report is published by the Care Inspectorate. You can download this report and others from our website.

Care services in Scotland cannot operate unless they are registered with the Care Inspectorate. We inspect, award grades and help services to improve. We also investigate complaints about care services and can take action when things aren't good enough.

Please get in touch with us if you would like more information or have any concerns about a care service.

You can also read more about our work online at www.careinspectorate.com

Contact us

Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

enquiries@careinspectorate.com

0345 600 9527

Find us on Facebook

Twitter: @careinspect

Other languages and formats

This report is available in other languages and formats on request.

Tha am foillseachadh seo ri fhaighinn ann an cruthannan is cànan eile ma nithear iarrtas.

অনুরোধসাপেক্ষে এই প্রকাশনাটি অন্য ফরম্যাট এবং অন্যান্য ভাষায় পাওয়া যায়।

یہ اشاعت درخواست کرنے پر دیگر شکلوں اور دیگر زبانوں میں فراہم کی جاسکتی ہے۔

ਬੇਨਤੀ 'ਤੇ ਇਹ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਨ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਹੋਰਨਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਉਪਲਬਧ ਹੈ।

هذه الوثيقة متوفرة بلغات ونماذج أخرى عند الطلب

本出版品有其他格式和其他語言備索。

Na życzenie niniejsza publikacja dostępna jest także w innych formatach oraz językach.