

Willow Den at The Falkirk Wheel Day Care of Children

Falkirk Wheel British Waterways
Lime Road
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Telephone: 07940146078

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
31 July 2024

Service provided by:
Willow Den Scotland Ltd

Service provider number:
SP2021000236

Service no:
CS2022000231

About the service

Willow Den at The Falkirk Wheel is registered to provide a fully outdoor care service to a maximum of 32 children, aged three years to those not yet attending primary school full time, at any one time.

The service is located in the grounds of The Falkirk Wheel, Falkirk. Children benefit from outdoor experiences at the large 'camp' area, situated in woodland close by. A smaller garden area, next to the indoor 'cabin', provides more outdoor play and learning opportunities. Children have access to portable toilets which are situated in a pop-up tent in the garden area, and within cubicles at the camp. The service is close to amenities such as shops, visitor centre and local landmarks.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Wednesday 31 July 2024 between 09:00 and 16:45. 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 and information submitted by the service.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with children in the service
- reviewed digital responses from three families and one staff
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice and interactions with children
- reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Children benefitted from opportunities to investigate and explore the world around them, at their own pace and without interruption.
- An abundance of open-ended, natural resources meant children had limitless opportunities to develop their imagination, curiosity and creative thinking skills.
- The caring staff team nurtured and supported children, and were responsive to meeting their needs.
- Staff communicated very well with each other and worked together to keep children safe.
- Children were empowered to lead their own play and learning.
- The service should continue to explore ways to gather the views of families.

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?	5 - Very Good
How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
How good is our leadership?	4 - Good
How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good

Further details on the particular areas inspected are provided at the end of this report.

How good is our care, play and learning?

5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

Quality Indicator 1.1 - Nurturing care and support

The kind, caring and nurturing approaches experienced by children meant they were relaxed and happy as their wellbeing was supported. Staff had developed positive relationships with children and knew them very well. They were responsive to children's needs and requests, and supported them appropriately. All families strongly agreed that they were happy with the care and support their children received. One family said, "All staff are genuinely so nice, friendly and easy to talk to. My daughter has struck up a great bond with them all." Another family told us, "Staff have taken time to do things individualised for my child and have made it a person centred experience." As a result, children felt valued and respected as individuals as their needs were being met.

The relaxed and unhurried atmosphere during mealtimes promoted a positive social experience for children. Children developed important life skills as they helped to prepare snack. They had been involved in planting and growing experiences and proudly showed us the potatoes and runner beans they had grown. These were harvested by children. They helped to wash and prepare the vegetables, which were then cooked on the fire pit. Children told us they tasted good, and said, "I like eating the chips." Packed lunches were provided by families. Staff sat with children and everyone ate together. This provided rich opportunities for children to talk about the fun they had been having and further developed strong attachments.

Children's overall wellbeing was supported through the effective use of personal planning, which included the views of parents and children. Staff used this information, alongside information shared informally by families at drop off and pick up time, to support children's routines. Personal plans were updated regularly with families. As a result, staff could respond to changes in children's lives. This encouraged strong relationships and meant children experienced a consistent and continuous approach to their care.

At the time of inspection no children required medication. We were satisfied that appropriate policies and procedures were in place to safely administer, record and share information with families when it was needed.

Quality Indicator 1.3 - Play and learning

Children were empowered to lead their own play and learning, developing their curiosity, creativity, and problem-solving skills. They benefitted from a staff team who were responsive and planned play opportunities in the moment. This promoted children's choice, based on their interests, and meant children felt valued and included.

Staff were skilful in their interactions and demonstrated a very good understanding of when to support children and when to step back. This provided children with opportunities to investigate and explore the world around them, at their own pace and without interruption. The effective use of questioning supported children to extend their thinking and deepen their learning. As a result children were happy, developing confidence in their abilities, and progressing well.

Children's play and learning opportunities were further enhanced as they developed strong connections to

their own and wider communities. For example, children regularly visited local shops to buy provisions, the visitor centre café, as well as local landmarks and waterways.

Children's learning and progress was recorded through carefully considered observations. These were shared with children and families in floorbooks, wall displays and digitally, through the use of an app. Families found this useful. One family said, "The online platform used by the nursery makes it easy to review and communicate any changes, either at planned reviews or out with these planned reviews."

Children's voices were clearly represented and evident throughout the setting through their mark making, and comments recorded by staff. Tracking and monitoring systems were being developed. This will further support staff to gather information, record children's progress and identify where additional learning opportunities may be required.

How good is our setting?

5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

Quality Indicator 2.2 - Children experience high quality facilities

Children and families were warmly greeted by staff as they arrived at the service. The 'cabin' provided an indoor space where most children were welcomed before quickly joining their friends in the 'garden' area. The cabin gave children and families a sense of belonging and being welcomed. The parents information area, photographs of children's adventures and floorbooks ensured they had a strong sense that they mattered.

The smaller garden area, situated behind the cabin, provided children with a variety of experiences. For example, planting, growing, waterplay and tree swings. There was a small summer house in this area which provided shelter, and warmth from a wood burning stove during colder weather. An abundance of open-ended, natural resources meant children had limitless opportunities to develop their imagination, curiosity and creative thinking skills.

The large 'camp' area had been thoughtfully considered and developed by staff, children and families over time. Toilet cubicles had been constructed to ensure children's privacy and dignity was respected whilst using portable toilets. A kitchen/cooking area had been created as well as a dining area, reading area, children's kitchen, woodworking bench, to mention a few. Children explored all areas and particularly enjoyed experimenting as they made and poured "tea". The 'sleepy hollow' provided a cosy sheltered area for children to rest and sleep, when needed. The natural environment offered challenge to promote and develop children's physical confidence. Outdoor experiences meant children were learning about the benefits of an active lifestyle that promoted their health and wellbeing.

The service made good use of best practice guidance, such as Care Inspectorate's SIMOA practice notes. This supported them as they encouraged children to think about how to stay safe. Robust risk assessments were reviewed regularly and updated when necessary by the manager. We discussed involving children in creating risk assessments. This was an area that had been identified by the service and plans were in place to take this forward. This would further promote opportunities for children to develop important life skills.

Children and staff had access to running water, hand soap, and paper towels in all areas of the site. This supported effective handwashing at key times. Cleaning routines meant we were satisfied that effective

infection prevention and control measures supported a safe environment and minimised the risk of infection.

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

The manager and staff team were committed to delivering a quality service for children and families. They had a shared vision and their values were evident in the nurturing interactions we witnessed during our visit.

Staff understood the important role they each played in meeting the needs of children and families. They told us that they were encouraged and supported by the manager, and provider, to continue developing skills and knowledge. A positive ethos meant children benefitted from a staff team who were motivated and responsive to meeting their needs.

Weekly meetings provided staff with opportunities to come together to reflect and plan for children's experiences. It also gave them time to discuss individual needs, next steps and share support strategies. As a result, all staff knew children very well and ensured children were supported to reach their full potential.

Self-evaluation was at an early stage in the newly established service. Staff were reflective in their practice and understood how self-evaluation helps to identify improvement priorities.

The service had developed an improvement plan. They had identified that parental engagement was an area they would like to continue to improve. We discussed meaningful ways to gather the views of children and families to inform future development of the service. This would further promote partnership working and ensure children and families felt involved.

How good is our staff team?

5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

Quality indicator 4.3 - Staff deployment

Staff knew children very well and secure relationships between them had been established. Children were supported by staff in ways which were appropriate to meet their needs. One family told us, "There is plenty staff on hand versus the number of children. My child is always happy and content with the level of care she receives." Another family said, "The availability of staff to children has made this transition so much more supportive for my child which I am very impressed with." This meant that children felt safe and happy in a service where a caring staff team nurtured and supported them.

Effective use was made of staff experience, knowledge and skills to ensure children's experiences across their day were positive. Staff communicated very well with each other and worked together to keep children safe and engaged in learning opportunities. Although there were only a few children present on the day of inspection, staff anticipated where and when support might be needed. This created a respectful atmosphere and allowed key tasks to be carried out whilst ensuring children were appropriately supported.

Staff wellbeing was important to the manager. They made time to meet with staff regularly. Staff told us they had a positive relationship with the manager and felt valued and supported. One member of the team told us, "My manager is always on hand to listen and help when needed."

The service recognised the importance of ensuring that the service was appropriately staffed at all times. Staff were flexible and breaks were planned to minimise the impact on children whilst making sure staff had time to rest and be refreshed.

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?	5 - Very Good
1.1 Nurturing care and support	5 - Very Good
1.3 Play and learning	5 - Very Good
How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	5 - Very 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?	5 - Very Good
4.3 Staff deployment	5 - Very Good

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