

Willow Den at Spartans Day Care of Children

Ainslie Park Stadium
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Edinburgh
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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
27 June 2023

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 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 and have access to the woodland area. Children also have access to outdoor toilets and eating spaces in the main play space.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 26 and 27 June 2023 between 09:15 and 17:25. 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 registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since registering.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with 14 children using the service and eight of their family members
- spoke with five staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents

Key messages

- Nurturing, kind and gentle interactions supported children to feel valued, loved and confident.
- Children's needs were met through effective personal planning.
- Children had developed strong relationships with staff, helping them to feel safe at nursery.
- Mealtimes were relaxed, peaceful and supported children's needs.
- Children were empowered to make informed decisions about their play and learning.
- Staff used their skills and knowledge to effectively support children with risky play.
- We discussed with management all tarpaulins and shelters should be utilised to maximise opportunities for children to rest and have access to cosy spaces.
- Robust quality assurance systems helped the manager to identify successes and where improvements were needed.

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?	5 - Very 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 how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

1.1 Nurturing care and support

Children were very happy, settled and confident in the setting. They were supported by kind, gentle and nurturing interactions, helping children to feel safe and loved. Staff were very good at recognising children's cues and things that mattered to them. For example, new shoes. One parent told us staff "often comment on small details about my child (such as a new water bottle/new wellies) which could easily go unnoticed. As a parent, this attention to detail is so lovely to hear and it supports my child to feel secure when she is saying goodbye to me."

To support children's emotional development and overall wellbeing, staff always engaged with children at their level and used supportive language. For example, when a child was upset due to their creations being spilled, staff showed empathy and commented "I know that's upsetting, you worked really hard on that, what can we do now?." This helped children feel heard, valued and cared for.

Personal plans contained important information to support staff to meet children needs. They knew children very well and confidently spoke about their individual needs, strategies and supports. These were shared with parents regularly through the use of online systems. Parents told us staff "always update us about the development of our child."

Mealtimes were very relaxed, ensuring a nurturing experience for children, which helped them develop positive relationships, social and life skills. For example, pouring their own drinks and serving their own food. Staff ate alongside children helping to support social development and promoting healthy relationships with food.

Medication systems were in place to support safe administration. We suggested some minor changes to the storage of medicine to ensure these were easily accessible. Management addressed these before the end of the inspection.

Safe sleeping practices were in place which included the use of individual sleep mats, blankets and sleep hammocks. Children were able to sleep and rest in response to their needs. Parents commented positively on this and one told us "the staff made sure that my child had the opportunity to rest if she needed to and asked them how they would like to rest."

1.3 Play and learning

Play was at the heart of the services approach and staff valued children's play opportunities. For example, one child was painting a stick when their family member arrived to take them home and staff kept it safe so they could continue painting it the following day.

Play experiences were appropriate for children's stages of development and they had the freedom to choose and lead their own learning. For example, when accessing the community garden, children chose to explore the flowers, build creations with stones and sticks. Parents told us they liked the "ethos and focus on child led outdoor play and learning." Children commented "I love my nursery. I love painting."

Children were immersed in the outdoor environment. They had fun and made informed choices about their experiences. For example, one child was eager to show their den in the woodland and commented "It is a dragons den, look, here it is at the top."

Child led play was also enhanced through staff's consultation with children on daily basis. For example, staff asked children if they had a wish for the next day, helping children feel respected and valued.

Children's literacy development was supported through a choice of books, songs, musical instruments and mark making experiences. This helped to support children's imagination, creativity and their senses. The use of the 'Willow Den Library' provided opportunities for children to enjoy stories with their families at home.

Risky play was encouraged and supported through the use of the outdoor area. Children were enabled to risk assess their own play, which meant children felt empowered to make decisions when climbing trees. For example, children confidently told us "look how high I am, I am on my motorbike" and "we can only climb as high as we feel safe." Parents told us their child "particularly loves the 'big wood swing' and getting all mucky in the mud kitchen."

Planning systems had recently been developed, resulting in a balance between intentional planning and child led planning. Observations highlighted where staff had recognised children's interests and further developed this. For example, the use of real tools and den building.

We reviewed children's next steps for learning and found most to be relevant and supportive of children's progress. Continuing to develop these will enable staff to support children in their learning, helping them to achieve to their full potential.

How good is our setting?

5 - Very Good

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

2.2 High quality facilities

Children experienced an environment that promoted imagination and curiosity. They had access to a large woodland area and the main play space, both of which were stocked with natural materials for children to play and learn with. For example, trees, shrubs, stones and sticks. Parents commented positively on the environment and one parent told us management and staff "have developed the unusual area really well and clearly put a lot of work in".

The environment provided rich play and learning experiences that suited all weathers. The use of tarpaulins and structures provided shelter from the rain and wind, helping to create cosy spaces for children to access. For example, the use of sleep huts provided dry spaces for children to rest and recharge. We discussed with management, staff ensuring all tarpaulins and shelters were in place to align with changing weathers to maximise the opportunities for children.

Children were supported to be aware of risks and consider their own safety. Staff used their knowledge and skills to develop children's awareness of boundaries to keep them safe. Children confidently told us about these. For example, "we can't go past the orange lines."

Play spaces were created in consultation with children and they had ownership of their environment, helping them to feel heard and valued. Although a fully outdoor nursery, children's artwork was displayed around the setting helping children to feel they mattered and develop their self-esteem and confidence.

The use of local community spaces provided further opportunities for children to explore their wider environment. For example, the community gardens where children had the opportunity to pick strawberries, read stories amongst the flowers, visit chickens and access the small play house. This nurtured children's connections with nature, helping to build resilience and wellbeing. Children commented "we like the woodlice, we have to be kind to them as they live here too."

Children were protected from harm by a number of safety measures. This included a secure entrance, an enclosed main play space, risk assessments of spaces and experiences, and appropriate infection prevention and control measures. Daily risk assessments of the environment helped to ensure risks were identified and actions taken to minimise these.

How good is our leadership?

5 - Very Good

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

3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are well led

Quality assurance systems in place helped management identify successes and where improvements were needed. For example, audits identified children's personal plans needed reviewed to help ensure they took account of current best practice. These had been revised, resulting in positive changes.

Self-evaluation had helped management and staff to rethink some ways of working and make changes to help nurture good outcomes for children. They made very good use of the Care Inspectorates "A quality framework for daycare of children, childminding and school-aged childcare" to support improvements. Staff took on lead roles, helping to develop their skills and enhance their knowledge. For example, recent reflections and changes to mealtimes and sleep routines helped ensure these were reflective of children's needs.

Monitoring systems were in place to support staff practice. New ways of working had a positive impact on outcomes for children. For example, the monitoring of children's next steps and revisiting "Realising the Ambition" had meant staff were developing a deeper understanding of meaningful observations of children's learning and progression.

Management were visible leaders who regularly spent time with children and staff. A shared vision between them contributed to a positive ethos in the setting, creating a welcoming and nurturing environment for children. Parents commented positively on this and told us they "found the manager to be extremely approachable and invested in my child's care and development and it is clear her number one focus are the children and making the nursery a safe and nurturing environment where the children thrive" and "we know that this is a very special place with very special people who care for and support our child completely."

Robust safer recruitment processes were in place to help ensure the right people were caring for children. The use of the national induction resource supported staff in their role and regular performance reviews offered them opportunities to discuss their practice with management. Staff commented positively on this and shared they had follow up meetings to discuss their progress and any supports that may be needed.

Children were protected by policies and procedures developed to reflect the unique nature of the outdoor service. These helped staff supported children in line with company policies, ensuring positive outcomes for children.

How good is our staff team?

5 - Very Good

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

4.3 Staff deployment

We found that the service was appropriately staffed to meet the needs of children and in keeping them safe while attending the service. The number of staff present contributed to meeting all children's needs. Enhanced staffing levels above the standard ratio ensured staff were suitably deployed to care for and supervise children in the open outdoor space.

The use of consistent bank staff and agency staff meant that there was a continuity of care for children and they were familiar with people who looked after them. One parent commented on some recent staff changes and told us the service "Have staffed this change well and made sure that there has been continuity for the children during this change."

Staff were respectful and worked well with each other, they clearly enjoyed their work and being with children. They worked effectively with each to ensure a positive environment that provided challenge and exciting play opportunities for children. This ensured there was a positive team ethos which benefitted children, helping them feel secure and settled within the service.

Staff communicated very well together at all times. The use of walkie talkies meant that important information was shared at the right time. For example, how many children were in a space or if a parent had arrived to collect their child. Weekly staff meetings offered opportunities for staff to share information and engage in professional dialogue to discuss the needs of children and the day to day running of the service.

Supervision of children was very good and staff ensured they were positioned in a place where they could see and engage with all children. This helped ensure children were kept safe and cared for.

A variety of training opportunities had taken place, helping to ensure staff were aware of current best practice and enhance their skills and knowledge. This included, observation training, story telling, floor book training and Forest School. Evaluations of these opportunities enabled staff to reflect on their practice and embed new learning, supporting good outcomes for 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?	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?	5 - Very Good
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	5 - Very Good
How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good
4.3 Staff deployment	5 - Very Good

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