

# Acorn Day Nursery Day Care of Children

The Steadings  
Kinaldy Farm  
St. Andrews  
KY16 8NA

Telephone: 01334475698

**Type of inspection:**  
Unannounced

**Completed on:**  
23 May 2023

**Service provided by:**  
Acorn Day Nursery (St. Andrews)  
Limited

**Service provider number:**  
SP2018013053

**Service no:**  
CS2018363762

## About the service

Acorn Day Nursery is registered to provide a service to a maximum of 52 children at any one time who are not yet attending primary school. Of these 52, no more than 19 may be aged under three years and of these 19, no more than nine may be aged under two years.

The service offers funded places for children aged three to five in partnership with Fife Council. The service is situated on a farm steading close to the town of St. Andrews. It is surrounded by local farmland where the children can visit farm animals. There are also local beaches and woodland areas nearby.

The children aged under three (the Seeds) have a large spacious playroom downstairs with a toilet and changing facilities. Children aged three to five (the Oaks) have a well-equipped playroom upstairs which includes toilet facilities.

## About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Tuesday 23 May 2023 between 08:30 and 19:00. 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 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:

- spent time with the children using the service
- received feedback from 19 of their family members
- spoke with staff members and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

## Key messages

- Staff were kind and caring towards children because they had built loving and nurturing relationships with them.
- Children were meaningfully listened to by staff and their views were respected.
- Children played in very well-developed outdoor spaces that offered them a wide range of fun, interesting and exciting experiences.
- Staff worked together with parents and families to support positive outcomes for children.
- Children benefitted from a staff team that were passionate and committed to taking forward improvements.
- Children spent lots of time in the local community, including forest and beach spaces, helping them build connections with the natural world.
- Mealtimes could be improved to offer a more relaxing and social experience 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?	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.

### Quality Indicator 1.1 - Nurturing care and support

Staff used warm, caring and nurturing approaches to support children. Children and staff enjoyed spending time together, laughing and chatting with each other as well as enjoying cuddles, when this was needed. This helped children feel loved, supported, and valued. One parent told us, "Acorn is superb. They prioritise care and development, all the while allowing children to grow in their own individual ways". This showed children were valued as individuals and respected.

All children had very good personal plans in place. These included their likes, dislikes and information about their medical care needs. Parents told us that they felt fully involved in planning their child's care and support. Personal plans were specific to children and identified what support they needed to achieve their potential. As a result, children received the right support at the right time and were progressing well.

Staff had created inviting, cosy spaces for children to rest and relax. For example, a quiet comfortable area had been built outside so children could sleep in the fresh air. This offered children a relaxing and safe space to sleep. Quiet spaces had been developed inside, and children accessed these areas to sit with a book or speak with their friends. This meant that children's emotional well-being was well supported.

Most mealtimes were valuable social experiences. The meals were healthy, nutritious and followed best practice guidance. Children had snack on the grass in the neighbour's garden. Staff sat with children and had meaningful conversations as they ate. When finished, children were able to freely explore the natural environment. Staff used these experiences well to build strong and trusting relationships. The lunchtime experience was less relaxed and children spent a lot of time waiting for their meal. This meant children's experience was less positive. We suggested staff build on the good practice observed at snack time as they develop their lunch time experience. This will ensure that children are developing a healthy relationship with food and mealtimes.

### Quality Indicator 1.3 - Play and learning

All staff knew children very well as individuals. They spoke confidently about children's interests, likes and dislikes. Parents told us that their children loved coming to the setting. Children told us that they liked the staff and felt listened to. As a result, children felt valued and respected as individuals.

Children had lots of opportunities to reflect on their learning with staff and their friends. Children and staff shared their learning on wall displays and in books that included photos, children's comments and staff observations. This showed children that their views on play were respected, while sharing their achievements with friends and family.

Children were able to choose where they would like to play for most of the session. There were times when children waited to move from one area to another. For example, as they lined up for lunch time. We encouraged the service to develop ways to make this more fun and engaging for children. This will ensure that transitions reduce interruptions to children's play. It would also continue the calm and nurturing experience children have the rest of the day.

Children's interests were reflected in the responsive planning approaches staff were using. Some children had shown a recent interest in frogs. To promote and extend their interests, staff took children to release some of the tadpoles they had into a local pond. Other children explored what tadpoles could eat in an aquarium in the setting. As a result, children were excited and keen to take part in their learning.

## 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 quality theme as very good.

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

The well planned indoor and outdoor spaces provided welcoming, interesting and exciting areas for children to explore. The indoor playrooms were comfortable and homely spaces with plenty of natural light and access to a large, enclosed garden outside. The playrooms were laid out to offer children easy access to resources. Staff carefully considered how to present the resources so they invited children to play. Children benefitted from regularly accessing the local forest area for extended periods of time. One parent told us, "They spend a lot of time outdoors, with an excellent garden and forest area - which keeps the kids active and close to nature". This showed children that they were valued and mattered.

Children had access to a very good range of resources that were clean, well-organised and encouraged exploration, enquiry and fun. Staff had developed the indoor and outdoor play spaces to offer a wide variety of interesting, open-ended and natural resources. The committed staff team ensured that areas were well developed, set up and supported children to lead their own learning. As a result, children explored opportunities that promoted and challenged their curiosity and imagination. Children followed their own interests within the play spaces and staff supported children very well.

Children's current interests and curiosities were visible in the fun and exciting play spaces. For example, children had recently been talking about their own family tree. This was presented in an attractive display and promoted discussion. As a result, children were encouraged to re-visit their learning experiences.

Homely, nurturing spaces were well used by staff and children for reading stories and resting. One parent said, "The nursery is very home like - they teach children through play". We observed strong, nurturing relationships between staff and children during these experiences. This supported children's language development positively from an early stage.

Children benefitted from a vast amount of outdoor learning experiences. This enabled children to have choice, direct their own play and supported them to be active and healthy. Outdoors, children were having fun exploring a variety of opportunities, such as a mud kitchen, swings and a water play area. One parent told us, "Acorn is fantastic, they have so much space to not only play inside or in the garden but to also explore the woods and meet the animals on the farm, as well as regularly taking them on field trips". This supported children to build connections with the natural world.

Effective infection prevention and control practices were well embedded across the service. Children and staff were seen regularly washing their hands, in line with good practice. They were confident and familiar with these routines. We asked staff to consistently offer effective handwashing facilities, including when they are on trips. For example, there were opportunities for them to use good practice in their forest play to improve handwashing on other trips and outings. This will mean that the potential for spread of infection is minimised.

Very good risk assessments were in place and regularly reviewed. This highlighted hazards and appropriate actions to minimise potential risks to children and staff. Children benefitted from a staff team which valued meaningful real-life experiences such as using real tools, climbing trees and exploring the forest. This approach encouraged children to develop an awareness of how to keep themselves and others safe while supporting their overall health and wellbeing.

## 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.

### Quality Indicator 3.1 - Quality assurance and improvement are led well

The passionate and enthusiastic team were committed to delivering high quality experiences for children and families. There was a shared inspirational vision amongst the staff team which valued children's rights, play and recognised each individual child's potential. As a result, improvements in the service put children at the heart.

Management team were approachable, motivating and empowering. Staff said they felt supported by the leadership team and had opportunities to develop their own leadership skills. One parent told us, "There is strong leadership to improve the setting and I can see that the staff are aware of opportunities". It was clear that families were confident that their children were benefitting from a strong culture of continuous improvement.

A range of effective quality assurance systems were in place which focused on improving outcomes for children. This included regular meetings to discuss planning, children's needs and priorities. Parents had a range of opportunities to influence change in the service. One parent said, "The leadership is extremely welcoming and open in their approach. Information is shared and opinions are respected, welcome and acted on where appropriate".

Staff knew the service well and were building on their confidence to discuss what they do well, how they know and what they could improve. These planned improvements were led well and impacted positively on the development of the service. There was a manageable and focussed improvement plan in place that had impacted positively on outcomes for children. It linked closely to the vision, values and aims of the service.

As staff become more confident in evaluating their practice, they should be encouraged to develop their skills in professional reflection. For example, they could make better use of relevant quality frameworks, theory and evidence when offering constructive feedback. This will ensure improvements are closely linked to best practice and support staff to innovate in promoting positive outcomes for children.

Staff were empowered to take part in professional discussions about children's needs at regular team meetings. They were offered frequent individual opportunities to spend time with management and discuss their own development. In addition, regular verbal and written communication across the team supported the shared vision for children's outcomes. These approaches were informed by best practice in motivating and developing the workforce. As a result, the team provided high quality play experiences and positive outcomes for children and their families.

## 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 quality theme as very good.

### Quality Indicator 4.3 - Staff deployment

Children benefitted from having opportunities to develop relationships with all staff in the service. Staff took a shared approach to ensuring all children were supported to achieve their potential. One parent told us, "Both of our children have formed strong bonds with all of the staff, not just their key workers". Staff interacted positively with the children and were kind, nurturing and caring towards them.

Children's needs were met consistently because the right number of staff were available at all times. One parent told us, "Staff are warm, friendly and welcoming. The team were very supportive and flexible regarding settling in. Often when you come in they are down at floor level engaged with children". Another parent told us, "They (the staff) are a beautiful, fun, supportive part of our life". This showed that children experienced consistently high-quality care.

Staff had developed positive working relationships with each other, creating an inclusive and supportive team. Regular meetings and support from senior staff supported shared reflection on practice and the service. This meant that staff felt valued and empowered to grow professionally and provided children with a happy and supportive environment.

Staff were proactive in recognising any gaps and supervised children while also spending quality time with them. They worked flexibly to supervise children in their play and offer a range of experiences safely. As a result, children experienced a very calm, nurturing experience most of the time.

The highly motivated staff team worked together to share key tasks and responsibilities. They worked very well as a team by communicating effectively. Staff shared ideas from their own learning which was based on best practice. This meant children experienced consistently high-quality care, play and learning. Staff told us they were listened to, felt valued and were fully aware of their roles.

## 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?	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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