

Willow Tree Nursery Day Care of Children

Berstane Road
Kirkwall
KW15 1NA

Telephone: 01856873535

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
5 March 2025

Service provided by:
Orkney Islands Council

Service provider number:
SP2003001951

Service no:
CS2021000173

About the service

Willow Tree Nursery is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 32 children not yet attending primary school at any one time. Conditions unique to the service are no more than 12 are aged under two years and no more than 20 are aged two to three years.

The nursery operates from the ground floor of premises previously used as student accommodation and is located within Kirkwall, Orkney. Children have access to three connected playrooms with a kitchen area and integral toilets. There is direct access to a fully enclosed outdoor play area. The service is situated close to local schools, parks, and other amenities.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 4 and 5 March 2025. 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, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection. In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with children using the service
- reviewed online questionnaires from 9 parents and carers
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Children were supported with kindness and nurturing approaches that supported their overall wellbeing.
- Children participated in a variety of developmentally appropriate play experiences which stimulated their natural curiosity, learning and creativity.
- Children and families benefitted from a committed manager and staff team.
- Staff deployment did not consistently meet children's needs.

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?	3 - Adequate

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 made an evaluation of good for this key question, as several important strengths, taken together, clearly outweighed areas for improvement. Whilst some improvements were needed, the strengths identified had a significant positive impact on children's experiences.

Quality Indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support

Children were supported with kindness and nurturing approaches that supported their overall wellbeing. Children were happy and had developed positive attachments to staff. This contributed to a positive ethos where children laughed, giggled and had fun. Staff were responsive to children's physical and emotional needs, helping to promote their independence, positive self-esteem and confidence.

Effective personal planning for each child, supported their overall wellbeing. This was carried out in collaboration with families and partners to promote consistency and continuity in care. Staff spoke knowledgeably about the individual care needs of children and the strategies in place to support them. As a result, children received well-planned care and support to meet their individual needs. This was highlighted as a strength by parents who told us: "My child is seen as an individual, staff know my (child) well and meet (child's) needs" and "staff clearly know (child) well, and are attuned to their interests"

Children's personal care needs were met in a dignified and respectful manner. Staff were sensitive and kind in their interactions and promoted children's independence. This supported children's confidence and security. Children's safety and wellbeing was promoted through effective arrangements for sleep routines. Staff were responsive to children's individual needs and cues and ensured they were offered a sleep.

Children benefitted from unhurried snack and mealtimes. During these experiences they were provided with some opportunities to develop independence skills. For example, children poured their own drinks. Staff were not always responsive to children's needs at mealtimes as they were at times, task focused. This meant they did not always remain seated at the table with children. This resulted in inconsistent support and supervision for children eating and minimised opportunities to support and extend children's social and communication skills.

Establishing good working relationships with families was a priority for the service. The manager explained that they were continuing to look at how they could improve parental engagement. There was daily communication with families, at drop off and collection time, via an online platform and there were opportunities for parents to spend time in the nursery. Some parents commented:

"We always feel welcomed by staff. Staff are brilliant at talking about our (child's) day"

"After every session at nursery I am told what my (child) has done that day and what (child's) learned"

Quality Indicator 1.3: Play and learning

Children participated in a variety of developmentally appropriate play experiences which stimulated their natural curiosity, learning and creativity. They benefitted from a good range of open-ended, natural child-centred resources, enabling them to explore their imagination and problem-solving skills. For example, in the mud kitchen children played with everyday items which sustained their interest for prolonged periods of time, contributing to the fun they had while playing and learning. Parents highlighted the play experiences as a strength. One parent commented.

"The play is regularly changed, and clearly children's interests influence how play is chosen. There is always a great variety of things for (child) to play with including different sensory experiences, imaginative play and outdoor play."

Overall staff used sensitive interactions to support children's learning and development. They engaged with children in a warm and kind manner. They were down at their level and offered reassurance fostering positive relationships. A range of communication techniques were used to support children at different developmental stages. These included, using open questions to extend play and learning as well as modelling new language to support younger children. However, on occasions there were missed opportunities to extend children's thinking through quality interactions. The service should review staff deployment to ensure staff interactions are consistently of a high quality to enable all children to widen their skills through play.

Some play experiences developed children's skills in language, literacy and numeracy. Staff naturally introduced mathematical language into conversation, interactions and experiences. When playing outside staff encouraged children to contrast and compare sizes and amounts when playing in the mud kitchen. This supported children's developing numeracy skills. Children enjoyed mark making, supporting the development of early writing. Staff facilitated opportunities for sharing stories, songs and rhymes with children. This supported children's enjoyment of literacy and the development of their talking and listening skills. This practice could be further extended and developed across the indoor and outdoor environment.

Child-centred planning approaches were evolving. The recording of observations and next steps was inconsistent. Some observations of children's play experiences reflected significant learning; however, others were descriptions of activities. As a result, children's achievements were not always captured. The service had recognised this as an identified area for development.

Children's play and learning was enhanced through strong connections to the local community. This included regular walks for the babies and trips to the play park. On the day of the inspection babies benefitted from a walk to Brandyquoy park. These experiences provided access to fresh air, impacting positively on their wellbeing.

How good is our setting?

4 - Good

We made an evaluation of good for this key question, as several important strengths taken together clearly outweighed areas for improvement. Whilst some improvements were needed, the strengths identified had a significant positive impact on children's experiences.

Quality Indicator 2.2: Children experience high quality facilities

The service was based in temporary accommodation, however the staff team worked hard to ensure the physical environment, met children's needs. They had used best practice guidance to carefully consider the experiences and spaces available within the indoor learning environment. This meant children benefited from a stimulating environment which was exciting and developmentally appropriate.

Playrooms were decorated in neutral colours which promoted a natural, calm environment. This fostered a welcoming atmosphere for the children. The addition of soft furnishings, lamps and plants softened the environment, creating a homely feel.

The layout of playrooms enabled children to access resources independently and provided ample space for exploration and play. Consideration had been given to the variety of activities and experiences on offer to stimulate children's curiosity and imagination. Children enjoyed sensory exploration scooping, pouring, and splashing in the water tray. This encouraged hand eye coordination and promoted social interaction and communication. A separate playroom for active energetic play, promoted physical fitness, agility, and co-ordination.

Children had access to outdoor play. They used the outdoor space with confidence and experienced enjoyment, challenge, and fun. Areas to climb, run and balance outdoors provided opportunities for children to develop their gross motor skills.

There was potential for the safety of children to be compromised whilst playing outdoors. For example, on occasions staff positioning did not ensure children were effectively supervised when playing in the nursery garden.

Overall staff were knowledgeable about infection prevention and control procedures, which promoted children's wellbeing. However, there were some inconsistencies in staff handwashing, which had the potential to increase the spread of infection.

How good is our leadership?

4 - Good

We made an evaluation of good for this key question, as several important strengths taken together clearly outweighed areas for improvement. Whilst some improvements were needed, the strengths identified had a significant positive impact on children's experiences.

Quality Indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well

Children and families benefitted from a committed manager and staff team. This created a happy and welcoming ethos in the service promoting a positive atmosphere for children to play and learn. The positive ethos meant staff were proactive in taking shared responsibility for change and improvement. This meant children received care and support from a staff team who were motivated and responsive to meeting their needs.

A shared vision, values and aims had been developed in consultation with staff and families. These were aspirational and captured the uniqueness of the setting which contributed to the positive ethos. The service valued opinions and involvement of children and their families. Regular feedback from families took place through a variety of methods such as, face to face discussions, questionnaires, and feedback requests. One parent told us:

"I feel like they are a family, and they have welcomed my child and me into the fold. Each member of staff has been friendly, knowledgeable and welcoming. I could say any concerns or questions and they would listen and help the best they can."

Self-evaluation processes were evolving, supporting staff to reflect well together. They made good use of best practice documents, supporting the overall evaluation of key performance indicators. This contributed to some improvements to children's play, care and learning. For example, improvements to spaces and family engagement. Some quality assurance processes were still in the early stages and there was scope to develop processes further. For example, they could be extended to include robust monitoring of children's daily experiences and staff deployment.

A realistic improvement plan was driving forward nursery developments. Priorities were outcome focussed with realistic targets which improved outcomes for children. Ongoing monitoring and reviewing of the priorities meant the manager and staff had a clear overview on their progress. This meant children benefitted from a service that continued to improve.

The manager and staff fully engaged in the inspection process and appreciated the guidance and suggestions offered by the inspector. This demonstrated their commitment and motivation to make improvements, to ensure positive outcomes for children.

How good is our staff team?

3 - Adequate

We evaluated this key question as adequate. While the strengths had a positive impact, key areas need to improve.

Quality Indicator 4.3: Staff deployment

Children and families experienced a warm welcome as staff greeted them on arrival at nursery. Positive relationships with children and families supported effective and detailed handovers. This meant that important information was shared and supported positive transitions between home and nursery.

All staff were caring and nurturing and committed to providing a positive experience for all children. They were warm and friendly in their approach which promoted a happy and inclusive environment where children could play and have fun. Several parents spoke positively about the staff team. Comments included:

"I can't praise the nursery enough; staff are friendly, and my child likes going to nursery. I think they put so much effort into what they do. I'm glad my child managed to get a space at Willow Tree Nursery."

"Great team, welcoming and very friendly always happy to help and speak to me throughout the day."

"Staff are friendly and approachable."

The ethos between team members was positive and interactions between staff were kind and respectful. This helped create a positive atmosphere for both staff and children to feel comfortable and secure in. At times, the staff team communicated well with each other when a task took them away from their designated area. For example, they would inform each other when leaving the room or when attending to a child's needs. This was inconsistent throughout the day and at times children were not effectively supported.

Staff deployment did not consistently meet children's needs. On occasions staff were task orientated and not always aware of their positioning in relation to supporting interactions, experiences and outcomes. This was particularly noticeable when staff were task focused at snack times, during busier times of the day and throughout daily transitions. As a result, staff did not always notice cues from children for support or interaction. This had the potential to compromise children's safety and impacted on play experiences. **(See Area for improvement 1)**

Areas for improvement

1. To ensure children are safe and receive high quality experiences at all times the provider and manager should as a minimum, review and make appropriate changes to staff deployment, to improve experiences for children.

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

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 ensure children are safeguarded and protected from harm, the provider should, at a minimum:

- a) Ensure the manager and staff have the required skills and knowledge in relation to recognising and responding to child protection concerns.
- b) Ensure the manager and staff are competent and knowledgeable about national, local, and the service's own child protection procedures and 'Getting it Right for Every Child' (GIRFEC).
- c) Ensure the manager and staff are competent in completing chronologies and use these to take appropriate action to support children and their families.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I am protected from harm, neglect, abuse, bullying, and exploitation by people who have a clear understanding of their responsibilities' (HSCS 3.20).

This area for improvement was made on 16 May 2023.

Action taken since then

Children were safeguarded and protected from harm as the manager and staff had the required skills and knowledge in relation to recognising and responding to child protection concerns. The staff and manager were competent and knowledgeable about national, local and the services child protection procedures. The staff and manager were aware of the importance of completing appropriate chronologies.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

To support positive and improved outcomes for children and families, the provider should ensure effective quality assurance systems are fully embedded into practice. This should include, but not be limited to, ensuring effective quality assurance, self evaluation, and improvement plans are in place which involve staff, children, and parents and lead to continuous improvement.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes' (HSCS 4.19).

This area for improvement was made on 16 May 2023.

Action taken since then

The manager and provider had developed good quality assurance processes and had embedded them into practice. For example, staff were supported to reflect together, and a realistic improvement plan was driving forward nursery developments. This meant children benefitted from a service that continued to improve.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 3

To support and meet children's needs and promote positive outcomes for children, the provider should improve the deployment of staff. This should include, but not be limited to, ensuring arrangements for planned absences are well managed to ensure consistent care and good outcomes for children.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'My needs are met by the right number of people' (HSCS 3.15).

This area for improvement was made on 16 May 2023.

Action taken since then

Absences were well managed, as children were familiar with supply staff and had formed positive, nurturing relationships. This supported the continuity of children's care and promoted positive outcomes.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 4

To support and meet children's needs and promote positive outcomes for children, the provider should ensure staff are skilled and competent in supporting children's health, wellbeing, and learning.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: '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 16 May 2023.

Action taken since then

Staff were skilled and competent in supporting children's health, wellbeing, and learning. They spoke knowledgeably about the needs and interests of children and the strategies in place to support them. As a result, children received well-planned care and support to meet their individual needs. This supported positive outcomes.

This area for improvement has been met.

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?	3 - Adequate
4.3 Staff deployment	3 - Adequate

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11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

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