

Summarised inspection findings

Midstocket Playgroup

Aberdeen City Council

20 August 2024

Key contextual information

Midstocket Playgroup is based within Rosemount Community Centre, a local authority centre based in central Aberdeen. The setting works in partnership with Aberdeen City Council to provide funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) places for children from the age of two and a half until they start primary school. The long-established playgroup is a registered charity, run by a management committee of parents. Children access an outdoor 'courtyard' area for almost all of their day. They also use a fenced grassy area at the side of the building regularly and have lunch in a playroom within the centre. A maximum of 24 children can attend at any one time. The current roll is 23. Full-day funded sessions are offered, between 9 am and 3 pm, during term time. Parents can also purchase additional hours. To maximise flexibility for parents, the manager has recently applied to the Care Inspectorate to amend the official start and finish times.

Around a third of children are new to the setting in the last two months. Around half of the children who attend have accessed funding for their 1140 hours of early learning and childcare (ELC) from January 2024. Children attend on a variety of patterns. A few children attend more than one setting across their week. This combines ELC sessions at playgroup with attendance in local nurseries. The small team includes a part-time manager, who also works directly with children, two practitioners and a support worker.

1.3 Leadership of change	satisfactory
<p>This indicator focuses on working together at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which reflects the context of the setting within its community. Planning for continuous improvement change should be evidence-based and clearly linked to strong self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure that the pace of change is well judged and appropriate to have a positive impact on outcomes for children. The themes are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the setting and its community■ strategic planning for continuous improvement■ implementing improvement and change	

- The experienced, hardworking manager has a clear vision for the work of the playgroup. Working with practitioners and parents, she has used professional learning appropriately to develop the approach of the team. For the last two years, practitioners have worked well together to develop a more child-led, active approach. Children now spend almost all of their time in the outdoor space. Children, parents, and the local community have been actively involved in making changes through building a large sand area and fundraising for equipment. Commendably, most parents are very well informed about, and supportive of, the play-based, outdoor approach. The whole team encourage children to be 'independent and responsible' in line with their vision statement. Practitioners should now work with children and families to ensure their values and all aspects of their vision are meaningful to children and families and inform all aspects of their practice.
- The team takes forward its focused improvement priorities, clearly linked to the developmental needs of young children. Recent work with colleagues from Aberdeen City Council has rightly identified the need to improve approaches to track and monitor children's progress. The team has made a few changes to resources and experiences to facilitate increased outdoor learning. The manager has included the whole team in making changes to their ways of working and informed parents. Practitioners now need to use national guidance to build on this positive start. This will enable the team to begin to review resources, continue to improve spaces and experiences and evaluate the impact of their work on children's progress.

- All practitioners now lead aspects of improvement through specific leadership roles. Responsibilities include outdoor learning, health and wellbeing and developing approaches to support transition. Although at the initial stages of having impact, most practitioners are enthusiastic about these opportunities to lead change. The team should now protect the time for regular, focused self-evaluation activities. Practitioners should also support children to reflect on the quality of the playgroup in developmentally appropriate ways. The management committee is keen to be more involved in quality assurance. This will help everyone be involved in reflecting on what is working well and how best to improve. Aspects of the work of the team are constrained by the physical layout of the large community centre. For example, this restricts free-flow play for children between indoor and outdoor areas. In addition, the small toilet facility and changing area is located up several flights of stairs. The manager and playgroup committee should continue to work in partnership with Aberdeen City Council and the community centre management to develop further high-quality spaces.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

satisfactory

This indicator focuses on ensuring high quality learning experience for young children. It highlights the importance of a very good understanding of child development and early learning pedagogy. Effective use is made of observation to inform future learning and identify the progress made. Children are involved in planning for their own learning. Together these ensure children's successes and achievements are maximised. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of interactions
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- Overall, there is a nurturing, supportive and encouraging atmosphere where almost all children settle quickly into their play outdoors. Practitioners have warm, positive relationships with children. Most children enjoy playing with, or alongside, their friends. The staff team are consistent and patient as they distract, guide, or assist children to begin to take turns and share attention and space in ways appropriate to their stage of development. A few children would benefit from increased interaction with practitioners to sustain their play with others.
- Practitioners worked together to increase the availability and variety of open-ended resources for children. Most children are engaged, curious and active as they transport open ended resources to build towers or problem-solve to build a steep slope. The team encourage children to be independent as they care for their small garden and plants. Practitioners should work together to review their use of the indoor space over the lunch period. This should include careful attention to planning for transitions, routines and areas for rest and sleep. Now that the team have established their outdoor approach, they should ensure an appropriate balance of child-initiated, adult-initiated, and adult-led learning. This will support practitioners to build effectively on what children can already do and would like to learn more about.
- All of the staff team are interested in, and care about, children's preferences and ideas. In the best examples, a few practitioners use appropriate vocabulary, commentary, and questions to encourage children to express their ideas. Most practitioners support children to use gesture, vocalisation, and their developing vocabulary to communicate their needs effectively. At times there are missed opportunities to build on children's ideas or skills. As a team, practitioners should continue to share and develop further their skills in the use of higher-order questions and commentary to support and extend children's thinking.
- Practitioners have a sound understanding of children as individuals. The team work closely with parents to ensure they understand children's preferences and needs. They should continue to develop further their understanding of children as learners. Practitioners record a few observations of experiences children have participated in and enjoyed with others. Almost all observations focus on the activities children have enjoyed. The manager has identified rightly that the frequency, quality and use of these observations is inconsistent. Observations do not always inform their responsive planning of learning effectively. The team now need to focus on identifying individual children's significant learning and next steps, and use this information to inform their planning. The manager should continue early work with the local authority to build the confidence and skills of the team in recording and reviewing children's progress. A few parents would appreciate additional information about their child's progress.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning and development pathways

- Practitioners provide play-based experiences across a wide range of areas of the curriculum. The management committee and staff team should now develop a curriculum rationale to reflect their outdoor learning approach. Practitioners should pay particular attention to how they ensure the curriculum is progressive and supports children to develop their interests in more depth.
- Practitioners work with parents to plan transitions into the playgroup effectively. Individual and group sessions support families well to get to know the team, spaces and routines in a relaxed and supportive way. The manager is proactive and persistent in seeking out connections to share information with other settings. The staff team works hard to make connections with other staff, particularly when children start a new nursery or start primary school. Very recently the team has focused on work to improve transitions between indoor and outdoor spaces. Practitioners should now continue this important work to improve routines and transitions across the day and how they access the upstairs cloakroom area. Parents are very positive about their experience and appreciate the individualised arrangements that supports the children and parent's needs.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on children and families – parental engagement

- Senior leaders and practitioners have positive, trusting relationships with families. The established management committee of parents and the newly elected chair are well informed about, and supportive of, the work of the team. Parents are relaxed and engaged as they talk daily with practitioners about what children have enjoyed. The team regularly share with parents photographs and videos of experiences children have taken part in. Parents enjoy popular 'stay and play' opportunities, with a focus on den building, outdoor learning, and transitions. These support families to understand and appreciate the benefits of experiences on offer. A few parents would appreciate increased information about the progress their child makes at playgroup.
- Practitioners have developed a range of partnerships that support and enhance children's experiences. Regular use of the local community supports learning well, for example visits to the library, frequent visits by children to local businesses, and a fortnightly session in the local park. As the team develop further their planning processes, there is scope to develop further the connection between learning at home and learning at playgroup.

2.1 Safeguarding

- The setting submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the setting and the education authority.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

satisfactory

This indicator reflects on the setting's approach to children's wellbeing which underpins their ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of each individual. A clear focus on wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all children to be the best they can be and celebrates their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- Practitioners, parents and children have developed strong partnerships and relationships with the local community across a number of years. These mutually supportive, positive relationships are a key strength of the playgroup. Practitioners have developed high levels of trust with children and families. The team are kind and patient as they support children to understand, express and cope with the new experience of being at playgroup. Children play co-operatively with, or alongside others, and are beginning to make friends. A few children are absorbed in their own play and learning and require personalised support to recognise the rights and needs of others. Practitioners role-model and implement agreed strategies consistently where children have specific needs.
- Children are developing their experience and understanding of their own and others wellbeing through a wide variety of daily experiences. A few children enjoy planning, buying and preparing foods with practitioners for snack, and lunch times. The majority of children are ready for more responsibilities in everyday routines to help them to develop their skills, self-esteem and confidence. Children develop a good awareness of road safety and talk together about how to keep one another safe as they play in the park. A few children are highly motivated as they plan to work with practitioners to make more dens and build a fire outdoors. The team should support children to explore all wellbeing indicators in a progressive way through the wide range of experiences.
- Most practitioners have a good understanding about their range of statutory duties. All practitioners have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities in keeping children safe. The team share information with senior leaders if they have a concern about individual children's wellbeing. Practitioners have a developing understanding of the record keeping necessary for children who need additional short or long-term support. As planned, the team should develop further their approaches to how they record and share information about children's care and learning. This will ensure clear and consistent record keeping is in place.
- Practitioners value and respect children as unique individuals. The team respond well to opportunities to discuss the importance of fairness and respect with children. The children who attend playgroup are a diverse and inclusive community of learners who are valued equally. Practitioners should continue to explore a range of planned and responsive opportunities to develop further children's understanding of, for example, diversity and gender.

3.2 Securing children's progress

satisfactory

This indicator relates to the development and learning of babies, toddlers and young children. It requires clear understanding of early learning and development and pedagogy. It reflects the integrated way young children learn and the importance of experiences and development happening on an individual basis within a supportive, nurturing and stimulating environment. High quality early learning and childcare contributes significantly to enhancing children's progress and achievement as they grow and learn. It can benefit all children by closing the attainment gap and ensuring equity for all. It is about the holistic nature of development and learning ensuring these foundations are secure in order to achieve future attainment success. The themes are:

- progress in communication, early language, mathematics, and health and wellbeing
- children's progress over time
- overall quality of children's achievement
- ensuring equity for all children

- Children aged two to three years are making progress appropriate to their individual developmental stage. They use their whole body to express their feelings and interests. Children are resilient and determined as they move heavy objects, dig in the sand or look carefully at flowers in the park.
- Almost all children make satisfactory progress in communication and early language. Most children use short sentences and their increasing vocabulary enthusiastically to share their experiences from home. Small groups enjoy exploring stories with practitioners and one another in their cosy den outdoors. A few children would benefit from increased access to stories and non-fiction texts throughout their day. All children benefit from joining in with the frequent and natural use of songs and rhyme as they play. Most children enjoy the opportunities to mark-make as they draw or write a shopping list. Overall, most older children are ready for more opportunities to apply and develop further their skills. This should include increased opportunities to tell their own stories, make their own books and mark-make for a purpose.
- In numeracy and mathematics, almost all children are making satisfactory progress. A few children count confidently and sort, match and categorise objects frequently. Children enjoy using measuring sticks they have made to compare their heights. The majority of children persevere to problem solve, for example, as they work together to balance and strengthen a tall tower. A minority of children are ready for a wider range of more challenging numeracy and mathematical experiences. This could include, for example, exploring information handling or developing further their understanding of time.
- Children's progress in health and wellbeing is good. Almost all children enjoy the freedom of exploring the natural environment of their local park. Children make good progress in their gross motor skills as they balance on different heights, move under a parachute, run, jump and mirror the actions of practitioners in games. The team should work with children and parents to develop a greater understanding and use of the language of wellbeing with children.
- The manager has identified that at present the team record limited information to document children's progress. Information does not yet accurately show the progress children make in their learning as a result of their time at playgroup. As practitioners continue to develop their skills in planning, observing, and recording children's learning, they should have a more accurate picture of children's progress over their time in playgroup.

- All practitioners have a detailed understanding of individual children and their local community. The team provides sensitive support to children who experience changes at home or who face potential barriers to progress. This promotes an ethos and culture of inclusion. The team could consider the use of specific interventions to support, for example, children where English is an additional language. The manager should also work with practitioners, parents, and partners to identify, monitor, and evaluate the impact of additional support on the progress of individual children.

1. Quality of care and support

1.1 Nurturing care and support

We evaluated this key question as good where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Children experienced nurturing, warm and caring interactions and were happy and settled within the service. They confidently interacted with staff and each other. Staff shared affection, laughter and fun with the children. This supported them to feel secure and form positive relationships.

Children's overall wellbeing was supported through the effective use of personal planning. Plans included individualised information on children's needs and how these would be met. Families were included in developing and reviewing these to ensure information was current and relevant. Staff had a good knowledge of children's plans, which aided them in providing individualised care and support for children.

Children's health and wellbeing was supported through nutritious food options and access to fresh water throughout the day. There were opportunities for children to develop their independence and life skills through involvement in the preparation and serving of their food. Children chopped vegetables and helped to prepare pizzas for lunch. Staff supported children when eating however, at times were distracted by tasks. We discussed with the manager the importance of staff consistently focusing on children to keep them safe and promote a sociable experience.

Appropriate storage and systems were in place for medication being administered safely. Staff were knowledgeable about children's health needs and knew the signs, symptoms and actions to take where a child may require medication. Medication forms contained accurate information. We advised that more details around administering medication were included, for example what to do if medication was ineffective. Management took immediate action to address this.

Children's safety and wellbeing was supported by staff's understanding of their role in identifying, recording and reporting any safeguarding concerns. Staff and management had undertaken relevant child protection training and a policy linking to current guidance was in place.

Chronologies were used effectively to record significant events in a child's life that may impact on their health and wellbeing. Positive relationships had been formed with other agencies such as health visitor. As a result, children and families were provided with the help and support they needed.

1.3 Play and learning

A child-led approach to learning had been implemented. Parents told us their child's development was supported through interesting and fun play experiences. Some children enjoyed filling and pouring containers at the outdoor water station. Children were engaged in sustained play experiences throughout the day. They explored the natural, open-ended resources to build a ramp and worked together to plant potatoes. Although children had fun during play, there were some missed opportunities for staff to extend their learning. This meant that at times, children's learning was not progressed. We discussed the importance of children being supported and challenged at an appropriate level to contribute towards them reaching their potential.

Opportunities for emerging language, literacy and numeracy were naturally woven into daily experiences. For example, children found numbers and letters whilst out on a walk and counted and measured when building towers. They enjoyed sharing books, rhymes and songs with staff in an engaging way.

Planning approaches were in the early stages of development. The manager and staff were working on knowledge of schematic play (when children repeat the same ideas or concepts in their play). This was positively impacting on staff practice and the quality of children's observations. Individual learning journals documented children's experiences, and these were shared with parents. This meant families felt valued and included in their child's learning and development.

The balance of responsive and intentional learning was in the early stages of development. We discussed the planning cycle and continuing to use 'Realising the Ambition' to provide further support to embed planning into practice. This will ensure children were provided with rich learning opportunities and experiences.

Children's experiences were enhanced through good links with the community and regular visits to places of interest. During the inspection children spent time in a local park, exploring a natural environment and enjoying physical play. Previous learning experiences included writing lists and using money at local shops and trips to the library. These types of visits helped children to build connections in their community and a sense of belonging.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: good

2. Quality of environment

2.2 Children experience high quality facilities

We evaluated this key question as adequate, where strengths only just outweighed weaknesses.

The indoor playroom was clean, bright and well ventilated. Toys and materials were easily accessible to children as they were stored in baskets and low-level shelving. This meant that children knew what was available to them, supporting them to make choices about their play. Children's artwork was displayed within the playroom supporting their sense of belonging and self-esteem.

Overall, effective infection prevention and control measures were in place as staff undertook regular cleaning throughout the day which helped support children's wellbeing. Staff and children washed their hands at appropriate times, such as before mealtimes or after toileting. This meant that children were protected from the potential spread of infection.

The challenging layout of the building and the location of the playroom and toilets meant that children were unable to benefit from free-flow indoor-outdoor play opportunities. The service was committed to providing outdoor play and children spent most of the day outdoors. Children had grown fruits, flowers and herbs in the nearby garden area. In the courtyard area children enjoyed splashing in puddles and sharing stories in the den. They explored and investigated the range of natural, open-ended resources on offer. These provided opportunities for children to develop their imagination and critical thinking skills.

However, some outdoor resources looked neglected and uninviting. Whilst these were cleaned regularly, some plastic toys were old and ingrained with dirt. This posed an infection prevention and control risk. We discussed this with the manager who took immediate action. Staff should

consider the quality and organisation of resources to promote children's curiosity, engagement and the quality of the learning environment (see Area for improvement 1).

Risk assessments were in place for indoor and outdoor environments to support the safety and wellbeing of the children. These documented potential risks and mitigations in place. Staff worked together to ensure children were accounted for throughout the day. However, children's safety within the courtyard area had not been fully considered. Gates including one at child height, meant there was the potential for children to leave the area unsupervised or for unauthorised persons to enter. The manager agreed to take the necessary action (see Area for improvement 2).

Area for improvement 1

To support children's play and learning the manager and staff should ensure the environment is well resourced and inviting for children.

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

'I am able to access a range of good quality equipment and furnishings to meet my needs, wishes and choices' (HSCS 5.23).

Area for improvement 2

To support children's safety the provider should ensure a full review is carried out of the setting identifying where all potential risks and hazards may exist for children and take appropriate action to address these.

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

'My environment is safe and secure' (HSCS 5.19).

Care Inspectorate evaluation: adequate

3. Quality of staffing

3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well

We evaluated this key question as good where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Children were cared for in a service with a clear ethos of promoting outdoor play for all children every day. Vision, values and aims supported families and staff to understand what to expect from the service.

Staff told us they felt 'very well supported' by the manager. Regular team meetings provided opportunities for staff to reflect on children's individual needs, share learning and discuss planning and developments within the service. To further evaluate performance, the manager and staff should continue to familiarise themselves with guidance documents 'How good is our Early Learning and Childcare' and 'A quality framework for daycare of children, childminding and school-aged childcare.'

The importance of using the views of parents and children to inform the planning and development of the service was recognised. Children and families views were actively sought through face-to-face discussions, questionnaires and stay and play sessions. An improvement plan was in

place which identified parental engagement as a priority. This was an ongoing area for development to further support partnership working. The service was provided by a parent led committee, which enabled families to be meaningfully involved in making decisions about the service development. This led to positive relationships and partnership working to promote good outcomes for children.

Some quality assurance processes were in place and included audits of medication which helped keep children safe and well. A quality assurance calendar had identified priorities to support developments. We suggested some additional audit checks be undertaken such as staff observations and monitoring of practice. This would help identify strengths and consider what could be improved on to support improvement within the service. The manager advised a plan was in place to give them more time to support with this.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: good

4. Quality of management and leadership

4.3 Staff deployment

We evaluated this key question as good where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Children were supported by the kind and caring staff team, and positive attachments between staff and children were evident. Staff interacted with children and each other in a respectful, considerate manner. This provided good role modelling and promoted a relaxed and happy atmosphere for children to enjoy. Parents told us staff were approachable and felt they knew them and their children well.

The staff team were stable and consistent, which ensured families knew which staff were supporting their children. There was a positive ethos of attendance within the service and some staff had worked within the playgroup for a number of years. Effective arrangements were in place in the event of absence which supported continuity and good quality outcomes for children.

Children benefitted from a staff team who were committed to their own professional development. Staff had completed core training and taken part in additional training to extend their skills and knowledge. They were confident in sharing their learning and identified how it had developed and improved their practice. Staff and parents told us of the positive impact outdoor training had on experiences for children.

Children were cared for by staff with a range of skills and knowledge. Modelling of practice from management helped ensure children's experiences across the day were positive. There was a focus on staff health and wellbeing which included regular one-to-one meetings with management. This meant staff felt supported in their roles. A supportive induction process for new members of staff helped them grow in confidence and become competent in their role. The setting used the 'Early Learning and Childcare National Induction Resource' to support induction and to encourage questions and reflection.

Care Inspectorate evaluation: good

During the previous Care Inspectorate inspection, the setting had no requirements and no area for improvement. As a result of this inspection, there are no requirements and two areas for improvement.

Areas for improvement

Area for improvement 1

- To support children's play and learning the manager and staff should ensure the environment is well resourced and inviting for children.

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

'I am able to access a range of good quality equipment and furnishings to meet my needs, wishes and choices' (HSCS 5.23).

Area for improvement 2

- To support children's safety the provider should ensure a full review is carried out of the setting identifying where all potential risks and hazards may exist for children and take appropriate action to address these.

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

'My environment is safe and secure' (HSCS 5.19).

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.