

Halkirk Playgroup Day Care of Children

Halkirk Primary School
Bral Terrace
Halkirk
KW12 6YN

Telephone: 01847 831 881

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
16 May 2025

Service provided by:
Halkirk Playgroup

Service provider number:
SP2003001795

Service no:
CS2003008609

About the service

Halkirk Playgroup is registered to provide a day care service to a maximum of 30 children aged three years, to not yet of an age to attend primary school.

Halkirk Playgroup is located within the school premises of Halkirk Primary School in Caithness. The premises consist of a large playroom with kitchen area, toilets and cloakroom. The playgroup also has access to a large outdoor play area.

The playgroup is committee-led and works in partnership with The Highland Council to provide funded early learning and childcare. At the time of the inspection there were 25 children in attendance.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 15 May 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
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents
- reviewed online questionnaires from 10 parents and carers.

As part of this inspection, we undertook a focus area. We have gathered specific information to help us understand more about how services support children's safety, wellbeing and engagement in their play and learning.

This included reviewing the following aspects:

- staff deployment
- safety of the physical environment, indoors and outdoors
- the quality of personal plans and how well children's needs are being met
- children's engagement with the experiences provided in their setting.

This information will be anonymised and analysed to help inform our future work with services.

Key messages

- Children were very happy, settled and having fun.
- Children had fun and were actively involved in leading their own play and learning experiences.
- Children were well supported to develop their skills in language and literacy and consolidate their learning through play.
- Children had direct access to the outdoor garden space giving them good opportunities for free flow play between indoors and outdoors.
- Nappy changing facilities within the setting were still of a temporary nature and did not meet best practice guidance.
- Children and families benefitted from a committed staff team.

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?	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?

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 very happy, settled and having fun. They experienced genuine warmth and caring approaches, supporting children to feel nurtured and loved. Staff were compassionate and responsive in their interactions, resulting in very strong attachments being formed. This contributed to an inclusive ethos and meant all children were confident and engaged in their play experiences.

Staff managed minor disputes between children very well. They skilfully empowered children to think about their choices and how this impacted on their peers. This demonstrated a very calm and supportive approach which helped children regulate their emotions and enabled them to resolve minor conflicts. As a result, children were gaining confidence and skills in regulating their individual emotional security and wellbeing.

Children's overall wellbeing was supported through effective use of personal planning. Staff worked in partnership with parents to ensure effective information sharing. As a result, staff had a very good knowledge of children's holistic needs, which enabled them to provide continuity in their care. Staff were attuned to children's individual needs and used strategies consistently and effectively, supporting them to reach their full potential.

High quality snack and lunchtime experiences promoted opportunities for children to develop independence and skills for life. For example, children poured their own milk, prepared and served their own snack and cleared away their dishes. The snack environment promoted a sociable, nurturing experience. The addition of a tablecloth, real crockery and cutlery supported a homely and relaxed atmosphere. At snack and lunchtimes, staff sat with children which provided to promote close attachments and develop language skills.

Children benefitted from their families being warmly welcomed into the service. They were enabled to support their children to settle in and participate in stay and play sessions. Establishing good working relationships with parents was important to the staff. There was daily communication with families at drop off and collection time as well as online updates and frequent parent meetings. All parent's felt communication was effective. Meaningful relationships had been formed with families who told us they felt included in the nursery community. This holistic approach resulted in children that were happy and learning, and families felt valued and included. Parents told us, "The staff are always on hand to have a chat at drop off and pick up and will make time for a longer discussion if required" and "the staff here are great; they always interact with parents at pickup and drop off. they make you feel comfortable and confident in leaving your child in their care."

Quality Indicator 1.3: Play and learning

Children had fun and were actively involved in leading their own play and learning experiences. Staff demonstrated a genuine interest in supporting play as they valued the importance of children having fun. Interesting, exciting materials and provocations promoted children's curiosity and creativity. They were enabled to make independent choices about where they played and moved confidently between the playroom and the outdoors.

Overall, the flow of the day was good and supported children's needs. However, daily transitions, such as moving from play to lunch and going home, could be better planned for. The service was aware of this and were committed to making improvements.

Staff interacted skilfully to support children's curiosities. This meant that interests were responded to in the moment as staff engaged with children to deepen their learning. Parents highlighted this as a key strength of the setting, they told us, "There is a great selection of different learning experiences which enables the children to develop their skills utilising the activities that engage them the most". Another parent commented, "My child has lots of opportunities to pursue experiences that reflect their interests, skilfully created by the staff team who stimulate curiosity and develop skills".

Children were well supported to develop their skills in language and literacy and consolidate their learning through play. Staff confidently scaffolded their learning experiences, for example, staff provided new vocabulary through play to extend their learning. Opportunities for numeracy and maths were naturally woven into children's play and learning. Children explored counting, number, time, size and shape through everyday experiences. A range of mark making resources supported children to engage in early writing through their play. Staff spontaneously read stories to children throughout the day. They encouraged interactive participation to influence children's engagement. This supported children's enjoyment, contributing to early reading, listening and talking skills.

Children were engaged in good quality play experiences outdoors that provided a variety of opportunities to be creative, develop problem solving skills and have fun. We observed children enjoying problem solving with large loose parts and being creative in the mud kitchen and large sand pit. As a result, children were happy and engaged in play outdoors.

Child-centred planning approaches were evolving. The recording of observations 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.

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

Children experienced an environment that was well furnished and maintained with plenty of ventilation and natural light. Children's artwork and family photographs were displayed, providing children with ownership of their setting as well as creating a sense of belonging.

Resources were of a good quality and included loose parts and open ended real life resources, to promote children's curiosity imagination and creativity. Soft furnishings, such as chairs and cushions, provided cosy spaces for children to rest during their day at the setting.

The layout of the indoor play room ensured that children could move around areas with ease, allowing them to access resources independently. Shelves and units at the appropriate height and some labelled boxes contributed to this. Children were confident while moving around the indoor play space and used resources well to support their ideas and interests. They also had the freedom to transport and move around resources to extend their play and learning further.

Children had direct access to the outdoor garden space giving them good opportunities for free flow play between indoors and outdoors. They moved freely between the play areas and engaged in a variety of outdoor play experiences. Children used the outdoor space with confidence and experienced enjoyment, challenge and fun.

Staff were mindful of where children were at all times. They regularly counted the number of children in each area and told other staff if they were taking children to another area of the setting. Consistent use of walkie talkies enhanced staff communication and allowed them to stay in constant contact across different areas of the setting such as, the indoor and outdoor spaces. This contributed to keeping children safe.

Nappy changing facilities within the setting were still of a temporary nature and did not meet best practice guidance. This had potential to increase the risk of infection as it did not ensure high levels of infection, prevention and control. At the last inspection, the provider advised that plans had been drawn up by The Highland Council to support them with implementing a permanent solution. However, this had not been actioned. As the provider does not own the building it has been difficult for them to take forward the plans without The Highland Council. We asked the service to provide us with an update on progress made with finding a suitable solution. **(See Area for improvement 1)**

Areas for improvement

1. To ensure children's safety and wellbeing and to prevent the risk of infection spreading. The provider should ensure a permanent arrangement for nappy changing is implemented, in line with best practice guidance.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I experience high quality care and support based on relevant evidence, guidance and best practice' (HSCS 4.11).

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 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. Staff consistently followed the vision and values of the service, contributing to a cohesive, nurturing environment for children and their families. Shared values were demonstrated in several ways, including staff interactions with children. This unified approach supported positive outcomes for children.

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. Parents strongly agreed or agreed that they were involved in a meaningful way to develop the service. One parent told us, "We are often asked what we as parents/carers are looking for".

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. For example, the service had reviewed and made significant changes to staff deployment, contributing to children receiving high quality care and support.

We spoke with the manager about developing opportunities for the service to look outwards and reflect on practice with colleagues from other settings to provide time for further professional dialogue and peer support.

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 key question as very good.

Quality Indicator 4.3: Staff deployment

Children benefitted from a caring and nurturing staff team. They were enthusiastic and committed to providing a positive experience for the children in their care. They were warm, friendly and responsive in their approach and demonstrated positive team working, which promoted a happy and secure environment for children. They modelled positive social interactions, both verbal and nonverbal, supporting children to develop an understanding of relationships. Parents were very complimentary of the staff team, comments included, "The team are amazing. They work so well together and with the children. The children's happiness is a true reflection on how amazing the team are" and "Very friendly and supportive staff who demonstrate a very high level of care for each individual child".

Children experienced a consistent routine because there was stability and predictability in the staff team. Children and families were building strong and trusting relationships with staff that promoted positive outcomes. Staff communicated well with each other to ensure there was consistency for children. Busier times of the day, such as mealtimes, were recognised and well planned for. This ensured staff could fully meet children's needs at these times.

Staff were proactive in recognising any gaps and ensuring effective supervision and quality engagement with children. Staff placed themselves thoughtfully to ensure all children's individual needs were well-considered. As a result, children benefitted from a very calm and positive experience.

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	5 - Very 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?	5 - Very Good
4.3 Staff deployment	5 - Very Good

To find out more

This inspection report is published by the Care Inspectorate. You can download this report and others from our website.

Care services in Scotland cannot operate unless they are registered with the Care Inspectorate. We inspect, award grades and help services to improve. We also investigate complaints about care services and can take action when things aren't good enough.

Please get in touch with us if you would like more information or have any concerns about a care service.

You can also read more about our work online at www.careinspectorate.com

Contact us

Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

enquiries@careinspectorate.com

0345 600 9527

Find us on Facebook

Twitter: @careinspect

Other languages and formats

This report is available in other languages and formats on request.

Tha am foillseachadh seo ri fhaighinn ann an cruthannan is cànan eile ma nithear iartras.

অনুরোধসাপেক্ষে এই প্রকাশনাটি অন্য ফরম্যাট এবং অন্যান্য ভাষায় পাওয়া যায়।

یہ اشاعت درخواست کرنے پر دیگر شکلوں اور دیگر زبانوں میں فراہم کی جاسکتی ہے۔

ਬੇਨਤੀ 'ਤੇ ਇਹ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਨ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਹੋਰਨਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਉਪਲਬਧ ਹੈ।

هذه الوثيقة متوفرة بلغات ونماذج أخرى عند الطلب

本出版品有其他格式和其他語言備索。

Na życzenie niniejsza publikacja dostępna jest także w innych formatach oraz językach.