

Heron Heights Childcare Child Minding

Alford

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
25 June 2025

Service provided by:
Sharon Lilley

Service provider number:
SP2023000199

Service no:
CS2023000310

About the service

Heron Heights Childcare provides a childminding service from their property in the hamlet of Montgarrie, near Alford, Aberdeenshire. Children access the ground level of the childminder's home for play, rest and meals. Sleeping facilities are also provided in an upstairs bedroom. An enclosed garden provides outdoor space for children to play.

The childminder is registered to provide a care service for a maximum of 6 children at any one time up to 16 years of age; of whom no more than 3 are not yet attending primary school and of whom no more than 1 is under 12 months. Numbers are inclusive of children of the childminder's family/household.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 25 June 2025 between 09:30 and 12:15. 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 registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since registration. This was the first inspection of the service.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with children during their play
- received four responses to our request for feedback from parents
- spoke with the childminder
- observed practice and children's experiences
- reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Children were supported with kind and nurturing interactions.
- Children were having fun and leading their play.
- The childminder made good use of local facilities helping children feel included in their community.
- Children benefited from being cared for in a clean and comfortable environment.
- The childminder should develop self-evaluation processes to support the continuous improvement of the service using current guidance documents.
- The childminder was committed to ongoing professional development which led to improved outcomes 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?	4 - Good
How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
How good is our leadership?	4 - Good
How good is our staff team?	4 - 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 evaluated this key question as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support

Children were happy and settled in the childminder's care. The childminder was kind and nurturing and responded to children's needs with smiles and cuddles. Minded children were encouraged to feel part of the family and had fun interacting with the childminder's own children. A parent commented, "Our child feels like part of the family and feels safe and welcome."

The childminder had built positive relationships with children and their families and welcomed them into the setting. Parents were able to have informal conversations about their child's day and share information to support their children's care at drop off and collection times. Parents were also updated through photographs and messages the childminder regularly shared with parents. Communication supported continuity of care between the childminder and home. One parent commented, "We have a great relationship. I'm always kept updated."

Children's overall wellbeing was supported through the childminder's knowledge and understanding of the children. The childminder had gathered basic information to keep children safe, such as contact details, health and allergy details. However, personal plans contained limited information. This increased the potential to miss key information to fully support children's changing care needs. We signposted the childminder to Guide for Providers on Personal Planning: Early Learning and Childcare (see area for improvement 1).

Children had access to safe and comfortable areas to sleep and rest. The childminder was aware of safe sleeping guidance. A cot was available for babies and a bed was available for older children. This promoted good habits and supported children's emotional security and wellbeing.

Children enjoyed home cooked meals and snacks provided by the childminder. This meant children ate foods they enjoyed and were well fed. The childminder sat and ate with the children, helping to keep them safe from choking as well as promoting good manners and social skills. A parent commented, "Lovely home cooked nutritious food is always provided by my childminder."

Children's personal care needs were met with dignity and respect. For example, children were asked if their nappy could be changed. Warm interactions during nappy changing created a relaxed experience which supported positive attachments.

Quality indicator 1.3: Play and learning

Children were offered a variety of play resources to support and develop their learning. There were age-appropriate toys that reflected children's current interest and curiosities. For example, one child was interested in transport and chose to play with the cars and diggers available. As a result, children were happy and engaged.

Children had fun interacting and playing with the childminder. The childminder sat alongside children to support them in their play. They modelled good listening and talking skills and encouraged children to share toys and play together. This supported communication skills and cooperative play.

The childminder shared children's experiences and progress verbally with families at pick up and drop off times and through photographs on a social media app. This enabled parents and families to be involved in their child's experiences. We discussed methods to personalise children's learning, to consider their skill development and possible next steps. This would further support children to progress and achieve.

Play experiences promoted the development of children's language, literacy and numeracy. The childminder was engaging when reading stories with the children. Children expressed laughter and joy listening to and joining in with action songs and rhymes with the childminder. These experiences promoted children's sense of fun and enjoyment as they explored words and numbers through play.

Children's experiences were enriched through regular opportunities to play and learn in the community. This included going to local parks, woodlands, library, shops and playing at local early years groups. Parents and carers talked positively about this aspect of the service. One parent commented, "[The childminder] has lots of fun activities at their home but also takes my child and the other little ones to play groups, library, park etc. So they get really varied activities!" These experiences supported children to develop their social skills and build meaningful connections with their community.

Areas for improvement

1. To support children's health and wellbeing, the childminder should ensure all children have a personal plan that meets their individual needs, choices and progress. This information should be used by the childminder to care for and support children effectively.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: "My personal plan (sometimes referred to as my care plan) is right for me because it sets out how my needs will be met, as well as my wishes and choices" (HSCS 1.15).

Supporting guidance can be found in the Guide for Providers on Personal Planning – Early Learning and Childcare on the Care Inspectorate Hub.

How good is our setting?

5 - Very Good

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

Children were cared for in a comfortable, well-maintained and inviting environment. Children had access to the downstairs area including a playroom where they selected resources and chose where to play with them. These included a play kitchen, dolls, building blocks and magnetic shapes. This meant children had ample space and were supported to lead their play.

Children benefited from opportunities to play outside. The attractive outdoor space included swings, slide, sand pit and fairy garden. This provided opportunities for children to develop their curiosity and imagination and helped keep them fit and well. A parent commented, "[The childminder] has a lovely large and enclosed garden which is safe to run around in and plenty of outdoor toys and games."

Children's safety was promoted as measures were in place to minimise risk. Overall, risk assessments identified potential hazards and helped ensure children's safety. We talked about updating these to include a benefit risk approach. Using these as working documents would ensure they were updated as and when required, supporting children's safety and wellbeing.

Children were cared for in a clean and tidy environment. Children were very well supported to wash hands at key times and were provided with individual hand towels to help prevent illness through cross-contamination.

Children and families' personal information was securely stored. This showed the childminder understood their responsibilities regarding storing and processing children's personal information.

How good is our leadership?

4 - Good

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

The aims of the service included, "To create a homely and welcoming atmosphere for all children to relax, play and have fun." These were evident in the interactions and relationships developed with children and families. The childminder recognised they had not yet involved children and families in a review of these aims. We suggested this be carried out to help ensure their views are reflected. Parents were provided with information about the service before children started to support their understanding of what to expect.

The childminder understood the importance of using views of children and families to inform experiences and the development of the service. These included "two stars and a wish" questionnaires to ask parents for their views. Although the responses were positive, we discussed how the childminder may use suggestions in the future to inform developments within the service. Parents told us they were involved in a meaningful way to develop the service. One parent said, "[The childminder] is totally open with their care and welcomes any suggestions or discussion." This meant that families felt listened to and their opinions were valued.

The childminder informally used self-evaluation to identify progress and recognise strengths and areas for improvement. They measured the quality of children's care, play and learning through general discussions with children and parents. This allowed the childminder some opportunity to be immediately responsive to children and families' requests and make changes. Recent improvements included a play shop to promote children's numeracy and literacy. Use of quality audit tools such as, 'A quality framework for daycare of children, childminding and school-aged childcare' would support the childminder to reflect further. We discussed reviewing the improvement and support questions contained within the resource to inform future developments and improvement planning. This would support the childminder to identify areas of improvement and further develop their service.

The childminder had developed relevant policies that supported the safe running of the service. We suggested some policies be reviewed and updated to ensure they follow guidance and are reflective of the service.

How good is our staff team?

4 - Good

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

The childminder was warm, kind and responsive to children. This created an environment within which children felt valued, secure and loved. The childminder understood the importance of listening to families to build trusting relationships that supported meeting children's needs. Parents commented:

"[The childminder] treats my child like one of their own and goes above and beyond to care for them."

"[The childminder] is helpful and devoted to the kids. [My child] loves going there and has a lovely time."

"We know that our child is safe and can rest easy when they are in [the childminder's] care."

The childminder demonstrated a clear understanding of how children develop and learn. They had made use of some professional development opportunities to enhance outcomes for children. For example, by attending first aid, child protection and supporting learning through play training. Further training and learning will support continued improvement for children and families.

The childminder had a good understanding of their role in relation to child protection. The childminder could identify indicators that may suggest a child was at risk of harm and knew who to report concerns to. This contributed to keeping children safe and nurtured.

The childminder had supportive links with local childminders. This provided opportunities for sharing ideas, developing knowledge and reflecting on practice. This contributed to positive outcomes for children.

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the service registered. Details of 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?	5 - Very Good
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	5 - Very 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?	4 - Good
4.1 Staff skills, knowledge and values	4 - Good

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