

# Auchlone Nature Kindergarten Day Care of Children

Auchlone Lodge  
Abercairny Estate  
Crieff  
PH7 3QZ

Telephone: 01764 683656

Type of inspection: Unannounced  
Inspection completed on: 27 February 2017

**Service provided by:**  
Mindstretchers Ltd.

**Service provider number:**  
SP2008009541

**Care service number:**  
CS2008168440

## About the service

The Care Inspectorate regulates care services in Scotland. Information in relation to all care services is available on our website at [www.careinspectorate.com](http://www.careinspectorate.com). The service was previously registered with the Care Commission and transferred its registration to the Care Inspectorate on 1 April 2011.

We check services are meeting the principles of Getting it Right for Every Child (also known as GIRFEC), Scotland's national approach to improving outcomes and wellbeing for children by offering the right help at the right time from the right people. It supports them and their parent(s) to work with the services that can help them. There are eight wellbeing indicators at the heart of Getting it Right for Every Child: safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included.

Auchlone Nature Kindergarten is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 25 children, of whom no more than 5 will be between 2 years and 3 years and 20 children aged 3 years and over. The care service may operate between 8.30am and 5.30pm from Monday to Friday, 49 weeks of the year. The service should ensure that staffing levels are always sufficient to ensure that children are adequately supervised when children are in the woodland area outwith the immediate environment of the main facility at the lodge.

The service is part of the Mindstretchers Ltd. group, an organisation which provides training in early learning and childcare across Scotland and in other parts of the world. The service was opened to show the implementation of the Nature Kindergarten philosophy and the impact this can have on children's development.

Some of the aims of the service, as stated by themselves, are to:

- "provide a safe and stimulating environment in which children can feel happy and secure
- provide children with a very naturalistic environment indoors, in the garden and in the wild woods where they are encouraged and supported to take risks and become the risk assessors
- encourage positive attitudes to self and others, and develop confidence and self-esteem
- create opportunities for both indoor and outdoor play which, at times, is challenging both physically and mentally
- encourage children to explore, appreciate and respect their environment."

## What people told us

We visited the service on Monday 27 February 2017. We spoke with staff, parents and children who were present at the time of the inspection.

We observed very confident and happy children who were being nurtured by staff who responded quickly to their interests. Children played happily together in the exceptionally engaging environment and had built strong friendships with each other, working together to solve problems. They played freely in their environment and showed a very good ability to manage and assess risks for themselves. They were also able to explain what they enjoyed about coming to Kindergarten. Comments included:

"We get to make lots of stuff. We make kites."

"I like it when we have the fire."

"We read lots of books."

"The Gruffalo and the big, bad mouse live in the deep, dark woods."

"We're going on an adventure."

We were able to talk to a number of parents during our inspection as they picked up their children. All of the parents we spoke to were very happy with the service they provided. They felt that the service was unique and had chosen to send their children here for that reason. They appreciated the philosophy and ethos of outdoor play and one parent spoke about how they had been able to take forward their vision of the importance of play for children's early development. They felt they were kept well informed by the staff and complimented the staff on how well they knew their children.

We sent out Care Standard Questionnaires to families before our visit. Almost all parents were happy with all aspects of the service that were being provided. Their comments included:

"A fantastic kindergarten that really allows our child to develop, grow in confidence, learn through doing and provides an environment where they learn to care for others and assess safe play."

"I only wish there were more nurseries like this - that the values and services from Auchlone were universal. I cannot commend them highly enough and though I would like to give critical feedback to improve service... I cannot fault anything they do."

"I cannot recommend Auchlone highly enough. The activities available and opportunities given to my son are second to none. He learns and develops through highly engaging, child led, yet well thought out and planned learning experiences. Every part of the Kindergarten puts the needs of my son at the centre and he has thrived since I moved him there. My favourite part of the week is picking him up from Auchlone and hearing all about the fantastic things he's done."

## Self assessment

The service submitted a self assessment to the Care Inspectorate and this had been completed in a thorough and systematic way. They had detailed their achievements and areas for improvement. This showed the service had a very good understanding of their provision and how to improve it.

## From this inspection we graded this service as:

<b>Quality of care and support</b>	6 - Excellent
<b>Quality of environment</b>	not assessed
<b>Quality of staffing</b>	not assessed
<b>Quality of management and leadership</b>	5 - Very Good

## What the service does well

Children were being offered challenging experiences which promoted their curiosity, creativity and ability to manage risks. The key focus on children's ability to develop skills for life in an environment of respect and trust ensured children were achieving their full potential. The opportunities offered by the engaging and stimulating environment helped children to manage risk for themselves, develop independence and problem solve in group, paired and adult supported situations. These experiences encouraged them to remain safe, healthy and active and also supported them to achieve.

Children's interests, needs and fascinations were responded to in a timely and meaningful way, extending their learning and allowing them to explore situations and trial ideas for themselves. Staff knew individuals very well and children's Learning Stories demonstrated their ability to recognise individual significant learning while also tracking their achievements and challenges. Children's play was closely observed to influence child led planning and children were encouraged to lead their own play from the earliest ages. This respectful and inclusive approach to play helped children feel responsible and confident. Children engaged in different types of play which supported them to progress well and achieve. It also gave them opportunities to explore the natural world and recognise their own abilities, supported by staff who praised and encouraged them to take risks.

We observed respectful and nurturing interactions between staff, children and families throughout our visit. The strong relationships staff had built with families allowed them to feel respected, included and responsible within the service. Parents shared the ethos and values of the service which enhanced the work of the setting to help children achieve. Building an environment with a focus on learning to respect others and their rights through play based experiences gave children the skills to socialise and build friendships quickly. This ethos had been built on a strong foundation of research and effective practice in early learning and childcare as part of the larger organisation's approach to nature theories in play.

The dedication and commitment of the staff team to ensure best outcomes for children was clear and they worked together to reflect on their practice throughout the day as well as more formally in their regular meetings. Their approaches to early learning and childcare were shared widely across Scotland and in other areas of the world as best practice examples. They used these expertise to lead their own developments as individuals and also built on their strengths to offer children experiences which challenged them and encouraged their wellbeing. The management team supported staff through an annual professional development meeting which directly impacted on their training as well as the development of the service.

## What the service could do better

We discussed how the service could further improve their monitoring systems to achieve a fuller and more varied picture of the service as a whole. Using a variety of observations methods would allow the staff team to recognise even more areas for children's development as well as help them identify areas for improvement in the service.

There were also plans to make changes to how they gathered information about children when they started and throughout their time in the setting. The use of the developmental milestones developed by Perth and Kinross Council may help the service to show the impact they have on children's development in a measured way. It would also allow staff to reflect on the positive impact they have on children's achievements throughout their time with them.

We asked that the service also consider how they involve parents more meaningfully in the development of the setting, including the ethos and principles of their approaches. Parents felt included and respected by staff and also fed back that their concerns and suggestions were listened to. We spoke about how this could be further enhanced to include them more fully by developing strategies for communicating with parents and involving them in the identified improvement priorities. This approach would encourage families to feel more responsible and included.

As part of the social service workforce, staff were registered with the Scottish Social Services Council, the registering body for all social services workers in Scotland. This organisation has published support materials for workers under a competency framework called the 'Continuous Learning Framework' ([http://www.continuouslearningframework.com/?wpfb\\_dl=106](http://www.continuouslearningframework.com/?wpfb_dl=106)). We spoke about how this document could further develop staff's professionalism and help them reflect on their practice. This, in turn, would offer children better experiences to enhance their wellbeing and development.

## Requirements

Number of requirements: 0

## Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 0

## 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).

## Inspection and grading history

Date	Type	Gradings	
10 Dec 2014	Unannounced	Care and support	6 - Excellent
		Environment	6 - Excellent
		Staffing	6 - Excellent
		Management and leadership	5 - Very good
14 Dec 2012	Unannounced	Care and support	5 - Very good
		Environment	6 - Excellent
		Staffing	5 - Very good
		Management and leadership	5 - Very good
28 Sep 2010	Unannounced	Care and support	5 - Very good
		Environment	Not assessed
		Staffing	Not assessed
		Management and leadership	5 - Very good
20 Oct 2009	Unannounced	Care and support	5 - Very good
		Environment	5 - Very good
		Staffing	5 - Very good
		Management and leadership	5 - Very good

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