

SOSCN Parents Guide to Out of School Care choosing school aged childcare



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Introduction

Local out of school care and holiday care information is provided at <http://www.scottishfamilies.gov.uk/> or your child's school or local community centre might have information on their noticeboard. Contact SOSCN if you have problems finding a service. Whether you have a choice of local services or even only one, it is important that you as a parent know you can rely on this service to take good care of your child. Children should be happy at the service; with access to a range of play, recreation, rest, cultural, sports and informal learning; which helps with their development and social skills.

School age childcare can also be known as out of school care, after school services or clubs, breakfast clubs and holiday clubs. The defining features for SOSCN is that it caters for children of school age and it is regulated childcare, play and learning provision.

1. Parent's and Children's Rights and Responsibilities

Parent's Rights

As a parent, you should ask the about your rights: for example, how does the service:

- Promote parental participation (is there a committee of parents or a parent's group?)
- Inform parents about how they can become involved
- Ensure parents can participate in decisions concerning them and the service
- Listen to and act on parental views, concerns, ideas and specific needs
- Tell parents what is happening in respect of any changes and in responding to issues that they raise

Responsibilities

With rights, come responsibilities, therefore, the service will ask, in return, from children and parents that:

- They respect the codes of conduct, contractual agreements, information requirements and all child protection processes of the service. This includes discussing and updating their child's individual development plan, every six months, which is a legal requirement for the service.
- They respect the rights of other children, parents, staff and volunteers in the service.
- Parents understand that the service has to operate within a legal, financial and equality framework, which determines the boundaries of their operational and policy decisions.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The UNCRC underpins a lot of Scottish Government policies related to the quality and provision of childcare. See also Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) information on the SOSCN website.

SOSCN's (see website) Aiming High Scotland or Achieving Quality Scotland accredited services and other good quality services should be happy to show you how they:

- Promote children's rights
- Inform children about their rights
- Ensure children participate in decisions concerning them and the service
- Listen to and act on children's views, concerns, ideas and specific needs

- Tell children what is happening in respect of any changes and in responding to issues they raise

The UNCRC is not a charter to set children rights against parents' rights; indeed it contains many strong statements of support for parents in raising their children.

2. Quality and legal registration

Childcare services must be registered with the Care Inspectorate and you can download the service's latest inspection report from their website:

<http://www.careinspectorate.com/>

Take note of anything in this report you want to ask questions about. The highest scores are 6 for excellent services, while 4 is still at a good reasonable level, but you should query about what action is being taken on any scores below that.

If the service is not registered with the Care Inspectorate we do not recommend using this service for childcare. Also you would not be able to use childcare tax credits or childcare vouchers with an unregistered service. You can use this checklist for judging other services like sports or drama clubs, but they are not registered and inspected "childcare".

An optional and additional measure of quality a service may have a current (issued within the last 2/3 years) SOSCN Aiming High Scotland Quality Assurance Award, this should be mentioned in their information materials and our certificate should be displayed. This Aiming High Award means the service meets standards over and above some Care Inspectorate quality areas, which extend the Care Inspectorate standards. From 2014 Achieving Quality Scotland is SOSCN's new updated quality framework for services, which exceeds Care Inspectorate standards and links closely with Getting it Right for Every Child.

3. Points to note on visiting the service

School age childcare and holiday services care for a wider age range and bigger children than nursery. Although this seems an obvious point, it is to prepare parents (perhaps) for the slight shock they may feel when they visit a service in operation, (which you should do, with your child, whose opinion is very important here).

The happy, boisterous noise of a wide age group of children at play can sound, and seem, a bit chaotic, but that is OK. Given that this is children's play and leisure time, with many staff in out of school care trained in the "Playwork Principles", they do know when to step in, or to leave things well alone, in order to let the children have plenty of their own free play opportunities.



4. Staffing

Staff have to be registered with the Scottish Social Service Council and hold, or be working towards, relevant qualifications, for their role. This is something you should ask about when you visit the service and you might want to ask about their experience or particular skills.

It is good to see a mix of people; with male and female staff, younger and older staff, reflecting the diversity of the local community in ethnicity and languages used. If your child has a disability, medical condition, or additional support need, of course you will want to know how, and if, staff have experience with this condition, or how they can address their own training needs, if they do not have relevant experience. Staff and volunteers with the service must have obtained an enhanced disclosure check including a check that are not on a list of people banned from working with children and young people (see SOSCN website).

Staff/ child ratios are much higher than in a school (1:8 or 1:10) so staff can get to know each individual child very well, some larger services may assign staff to lead or work with their own smaller groups of children; ensuring continuity of named staff for the children.

The staff should always be calm and consistent in their dealings with the children and the service should have clear boundaries set for children in their day to day activities. We recommend that children have participated in creating the rules for the service, as they are more likely to understand and take ownership of behaviour rules that they developed themselves.

5. Child Protection

A service should have a clear anti-bullying behaviour strategy and inform you of their child protection policies procedures and processes. This might include codes of conduct for staff, volunteers, parents, carers, children and young people.

6. Equality and Diversity

You and your child should be warmly welcomed to the service, and, whatever your gender, culture, language (including sign language), disability, faith, employment or marital status, class or age, the service should treat you equally and inclusively. Unfortunately, some services may be located in inaccessible premises for wheelchair users or parents with babies in prams, and they often have little control over their premises. Nevertheless, even if a service cannot accommodate you or your child's needs, they should courteously help by signposting you to sources of other services and support.



7. Health and Safety

Parents will naturally be concerned about health and safety issues and, of course, every service should meet all required standards for this; including infection control through strict hand washing guidance; safety of equipment and food preparation, safety of any transport used, and while escorting children to and from school, or on outings. Parents have a part to play here by meeting the service requirements for information and written permissions in terms of medications administration, or emergency contacts child health issues, allergies and recent contact with infectious illnesses (see SOSCN website for more details on each of these topics).

All service users from the youngest child up should be well versed in the need to follow emergency procedures, and, to follow such instructions to the letter, therefore you should ask about things like fire drills, or changes to the escorted routes from school.

Clean and comfortable settings, with equipment and resources in good working order and regularly maintained are another indicator of quality. Children and young people might be engaged in quite messy play or projects too, especially in all day or holiday care, but areas for quiet activities, serving food, and the toilets must always be clean and well maintained.

It is important that parents help their children participate in a full range of activities by providing old clothes for messy play and warm/waterproof protective clothing for outdoor play in Scotland's variable weather conditions. For term-time breakfast clubs and after school care, services understand it is difficult to provide changes from school uniform and they likely will provide protective aprons etc if needed.

8. Play and Risk

The Health and Safety Executive understand the need for a healthy balance between play and risk, while the Scottish Government's National Play Strategy and related Action Plan emphasises the need to ensure children have opportunities for risky play (See SOSCN website for more information).

A play centred service will, however, work with the parents and children in terms of extending everyone's understanding of play and risk; so some services might ask you, especially for holiday care, to give permission for activities like tree climbing, muddy play, exploring streams and water or snow play outside (child wearing wellies/old clothes). Such activities are a lot of fun for children providing them with new experiences and helping them develop new skills, thus aiding in their overall development.

If your child has an illness, disability or additional support need, you will understandably want to ensure that the staff are able to ensure your child is included in all types of play activities, including learning to assess risk themselves as they get older and more confident about trying new things. There are many different ways to provide inclusive play opportunities, which stretch and challenge while recognising the needs of each individual child for support or adaptation of activities.



9. Premises and Resources

Many services have to adapt classrooms, or dining halls, and set everything up at 3pm then clear it all away again at finishing time, so they will not necessarily have access to gym halls, large outdoor space, large equipment and resources. This does not mean they are of lesser quality, but they should be adapting their programme to ensure children get access to outdoor play or spaces for more physically active play.

Throughout the year, but especially during all day holiday care, they should be taking children out regularly to local parks or recreation spaces. Do ask the service about children's access to playing outside and how more active games, inside or out, are provided.

Compared to what you maybe saw at nursery, there may be a lot less in the way of glossy toys and equipment, but rather more disposable resources like old cardboard boxes, scrap materials, or dressing up boxes with old curtains and hats. There might be a large space with children using balls, beanbags, skipping ropes, hoops, playing, running and chasing each other about. There should be a book and relaxing corner, where children can rest or read quietly and you should be able to see evidence of art projects, children playing or chatting together, and generally relaxing.

You should ask about the range and variety of activities on offer and special themed longer projects, as well as trips during holidays and how special occasions are celebrated. Are the range of ages and different types of play and interests covered by the activities on offer?

TV, DVDs, and computer games might be available, although their use should be limited and age appropriate with safeguards as well as web protection in place for any online activities. Good quality services will also discourage children bringing their own

computer games or consoles, mobile phones or toys to the service, indeed there may be a policy asking that parents do not supply their child with a mobile phone.

10. Food

It is a legal requirement at registration and every six months for you and the service to discuss and update if needed, your child's development plan, which every service is required to have. Within this, you and your child should update the information on the child's dietary needs and preferences. This is especially important for recording of allergies and cultural preferences, as well as any other relevant information relating to your child's general needs.

Breakfast clubs provide a choice of nutritious food to start the day and most after school clubs provide healthy snacks, fruit, water, breadsticks, toast, soup etc., rather than a meal. For all day and holiday clubs you may be asked to provide a healthy packed lunch. You should ask to see recent menus and any feedback on them from children or parents. Children should not normally bring in their own sweets or snacks, unless required as part of dietary need (e.g. for glucose levels).

11. Homework

Some children may get help with homework, from staff, or each other, but some services may prefer that your child does homework at home. You and your child may also have preferences here, so it is good to ask about their homework policy, if any, and to let them know what you and your child prefer. If a child has, say, dyslexia, then it is important the service knows this, as there may be story times, numbers and spelling games, during the course of the various activities; and staff should know in order to adapt games to ensure inclusion of all children.



12. Paying for childcare

Some services will give you information on childcare tax credits or childcare vouchers. Ask about contractual arrangements for late cancellations, late pick-ups, service closures (snow days, floods etc.) and debt management processes. Regular year round users may be able to pay annualised fees (cost of both term time and holidays added together and the average worked out as regular weekly fee), some services also require a deposit to secure a place. Most school age childcare and holiday services in Scotland do not receive much in the way of grants and public subsidies, therefore the fees they charge reflect the cost of providing the service. Most staff in out of school care are not highly paid either, and more than half of services are run by voluntary committees of parents and are not for profit, therefore it is important parents claim themselves for any subsidies such as tax credits to help them pay for childcare.

13. Summing Up

Use your own intuition and perceptions from your child, on what is best for her or him. A sporty child might prefer a service that provides a lot of outdoor games and occasional sports coaching; yet this may also be good for stretching the horizons of a less physically active child. The "sporty child" in turn may have never explored their creative side much, so could enjoy a chance to become involved in arts projects. A good quality service will accommodate many interests; the main one in being an enjoyable place to be with friends, for your child, and in giving you that essential peace of mind that they are happy and well cared for in your absence. The atmosphere of the service should be a guide; warm and welcoming, busy and happy. Parents and carers should know that while services might be located in a school they are not run or managed by the school in Scotland. About a third of services are private sector providers, they often tend to be nurseries, which also provide school age childcare. Only a handful of local authorities (councils) in Scotland manage school age childcare and holiday provision. More than half of school age childcare services are in the not for profit voluntary sector and are managed by a board or committee of parent users. There may be opportunities for you as a parent or carer to contribute your skills or to help with tasks like fundraising or raising the profile of the service in the community. Every little helps, even if you do not have time to volunteer for the board or committee.

Checklist

- Find a local service scottishfamilies.gov.uk
- Read their inspection report and note down questions to ask: Get inspection reports from careinspectorate.com
- Are they quality assured by SOSCN? [Achieving Quality Scotland](#) (not compulsory)
- Are they committed to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child? Do children and parents have a say and influence the service in meaningful ways? [UNCRC](#)
- Are staff registered with the Scottish Social Services Council and suitably qualified? sssc.uk.com
- Are Staff disclosure checked? Check with the service. disclosurescotland.co.uk
- Is the service warm and welcoming to you and your child?
- Are the children happily involved in a range of activities?
- Are the staff calm, engaged and warm, without overtly interfering?
- Are there areas for quiet rest, indoors and out; space for running around and good choices of activities?
- What are the pickup arrangements and emergency procedures?
- Do the staff interact well with each other, children and parents?
- Check and ask about up to date and relevant policies and procedures on all of the aspects of a service important to you, and your child, such as: