



The Secret Garden Outdoor Nursery

Information Booklet 2019-2020



Image courtesy of Helen Elder

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Part 1. About the Secret Garden

The Secret Garden Outdoor Nursery is a not-for-profit community-led organisation offering families in and beyond North East Fife a unique, outdoor childcare service.

Cathy Bache first piloted the concept of outdoor play and learning for children aged 3-5 back in September 2004, during her time as a child minder. With this experience behind her, Cathy (a registered Drama and Primary Teacher) and her staff skilfully developed the nursery to provide a physically and intellectually stimulating environment, within Letham woods, that is safe and secure for children to play in and be cared for. The nursery opened its invisible doors for the first time in 2008.

The Secret Garden is open for 47 weeks of the year, closing for 3 weeks in the summer, which includes our week of staff training, and for two weeks over Christmas. Full details about our session times and current fees can be found in Part 3. Fees and Pre-school Funding.

We are registered with the Care Inspectorate - our registration number is CS2008176034.

Our pre-school child to staff ratio is 1:7, with a maximum of 18 pre-school children per session.

Priority of place is given to the siblings of existing clients, and to children from within the catchment area of Letham Primary School.

Our full day sessions (Monday - Thursday) are 8.5 hours long, which may seem a lengthy day and perhaps, to some, even extreme! In our experience, however, if the day is carefully planned, all needs of the children are met: social, emotional, intellectual, creative and physical. The monitoring of the physical needs of the children throughout the day is most important, because we all need quiet time and rest.

The structure of the day is organised so that at the start, when the children arrive at Letham Park, there is time and space for each child to find their own way into play and socialising. As the children warm to the environment and each other, play becomes more dynamic and physical. A walk is then taken up the hill and we establish our 'base camp' in the woods for the day. The structure of our day is described more fully in Part 2.

Here are the answers to some frequently asked questions, and some tips from parents and carers who are 'old hands' at the Secret Garden!

"What do you do when it rains?"

Play!! Remaining warm and dry is the most important element in enabling happiness

and creative play in all weathers. Whilst the woods themselves afford shelter (and our practitioners know where to go to obtain maximum shelter from the prevailing wind), we also have large, lightweight tarps that we rig up to provide extra protection - and a dry place to eat lunch. We are fortunate to have a yurt with a wood-burning stove that is really toasty in even the coldest conditions, and we can access this whenever required.

“What about toileting?”

We have a specific area at each play camp where we erect a tarp to offer shelter and privacy for toileting. We also have a composting toilet in our garden. We compost our waste, offering the children the opportunity to witness the transformational process of poo back into earth. Children not used to toileting outside quickly adapt, and staff are on hand to assist as needed.

“How will you support my child in toilet training?”

Playing out in the woods all day in our spacious environment is certainly more challenging for children when it comes to toilet training. They may be up a tree when the urge for toileting comes, so the effort to get to the appropriate location simply doesn't work. In our experience, your child may need to remain in nappies/pull-ups when they are already fully proficient at toileting at home. However, this does not appear to confuse or set back success at home.

We welcome any child aged 3+ to the Secret Garden regardless of toileting success, but would ask for your full cooperation if we request that your child remain in nappies/pull-ups for a period.

“How will you assist my child in settling in at the Secret Garden?”

We appreciate what a huge step it is for both children and parents/carers to enter into pre-school education, and acknowledge that fears may be manifested by both the child and adult. Our aim is to support your child as best we can as they enter this new world.

After your initial visit to meet staff, ask questions and explore a bit of the woods with your child, we then invite you back a week prior to your child's first day, for a two-hour pre-start visit. This visit will be on a day on which your child will ultimately attend, in order that they meet the adults who will be caring for them, socialise with the children they will play with, and also take part in the lunchtime routine.

Then, on your child's first day, we ask that you bring them to the play park at the foot of Letham village with enough time to play and socialise before walking up the hill. If your child is anxious we may ask that the drop off be as swift as possible, if this feels like the right approach for your child. This may sound counterintuitive, but in our experience, often the swifter the separation the quicker your child will settle down. For other children, it may be helpful for a parent or carer to stay a little while. Our staff are very skilled in managing this transition, and will advise you, and support your child, in the best way possible. If on your departure your child is crying, be assured that they will be cared for in an exemplary way. We find that compassionate,

empathetic listening helps the child to connect with the staff, and release any feelings of sadness or fear, allowing him/her to step into play quite quickly. We will contact you via a phone call or text message to keep you informed as to how your child is getting on, and how the staff are supporting them.

At the Secret Garden we have been using the Hand in Hand (Parenting by Connection) approach in our work with children since 2015, and we have experienced great outcomes for children, staff and parents. Hand in Hand is a connection-based approach to parenting and working with children (see www.handinhandparenting.org). The founder, Patty Wipfler, spent many years running a pre-school setting using the Hand in Hand ethos and tools.

Hand in Hand uses 5 simple and effective listening tools, which can help us:

- Build stronger, closer and more cooperative relationships with the children in our care,
- Help relieve separation anxiety and clinginess,
- Set warm and effective limits, and develop effective connection-based tools and strategies for working with challenging behaviour and in areas where there are commonly tensions, and
- Build networks of support for the adults who are caring for children.

“My child comes home frustrated that he can’t climb the trees - could you help him please?”

We have a policy of not physically assisting children to climb up trees. We love explaining the best way to use their bodies to succeed as they climb, but are wary of helping them reach a goal that they are not yet physically or emotionally able to achieve. Many of the self-taught activities of the Secret Garden rely on physical experience and strength, a lot of watching peers, and a huge amount of perseverance, all of which help develop emotional resilience.

When your child does succeed in climbing the tree, or jumping on the swing, the sense of achievement is phenomenal for both child and staff!

Tips from Parents and Carers

Weather

"No matter what you think about the weather on a given day, try to be positive, as this will rub off on the children. Turn rainy days into lots of puddles to play in, a drink for the plants, and good news for the farmers who are growing crops...."

"Adults often need a little reminder that children see things differently, and that we are not being cruel by exposing them to all weathers. We are creating opportunities and memories which will stay with them."

"There is no such thing as bad weather, just inappropriate clothing."

Drop-off and mud

"Be prepared for an initial sense of doubt on dropping your little one(s) off in the pouring rain as you dash back indoors as quickly as possible. Enough to say as confidence grows with staff (and with your own child's resilience), it soon passes."

"Don't worry about sending your child to the Secret Garden in muddy clothes! They don't have to look immaculate as they certainly won't be at the end of the day!"

"If you're heading to work after dropping your child off at the park, keep a pair of wellies in the car. This saves you having to clean your shoes in the sink at work!"

Pick-up and mud

"If you like to have a clean car, keep an old car mat in the boot and stand your child on it next to the car to take off their wellies and dirty clothes. Alternatively, change in the lovely mud shelter in the park. A trug in the boot is handy for really muddy clothes."

"Check the label before washing waterproofs. Some have a coating and you shouldn't use a detergent as it strips away the waterproofing. If you must wash them, a warm water-only wash in your machine does just as well."

"Be on the look-out for hidden twigs, stones, flower heads etc. in pockets and rucksacks before putting items in the wash!"

Clothing

"Waterproof trousers with braces are best as they don't get pulled down when sliding down muddy hills. However, waterproof trousers without braces are easier for toileting." (Secret Garden says: 'Even our parents/carers don't always agree! Good quality waterproofs are important, whichever style you choose - please do check them regularly so your child stays dry and happy!')

"Fleece as a mid-layer top and bottom works much better than cotton as it is warmer and less likely to get saturated with water. Ones with cuffs work well to tuck

under socks so they don't pull up when the child puts on the outer layer."

"Standard wellies offer little warmth - neoprene lined wellies or snow boots are much better for colder days."

"Have a supply of cheap gloves ('magic' gloves are good) and send a few in with your child each day so that they have dry ones if they get wet. Sew your child's name on if you want to stand a chance of not losing any!"

(Please see our Kit List in Part 4 for a more detailed description of the clothing your child will need)

Rucksack

"The rucksacks provided are great but not waterproof. Put spare clothing in a waterproof dry bag (eg. those by Exped) inside the rucksack (plastic bags leak!)"

"Put a spare carrier bag in the rucksack in which to put wet or soiled clothing."

Lunch-box

"Little food flasks to keep spaghetti, macaroni, beans, pasta, etc warm are handy, but a food flask and a drink flask together may be a bit too heavy."

"Food and drink containers should be easy to open - think cold fingers on small hands - this encourages independence as your child is less reliant on adult help."

"A small flask of hot chocolate goes down a treat on winter days!"

"Only fill your child's water bottle with as much water as you think they will realistically drink - this will help keep the weight of their rucksack down, and you can also get away with including a wee flask of hot chocolate too without overloading your little one!"

"It's useful to pop small items such as cutlery together in a small bag to stop them disappearing to the bottom of rucksacks!"

"If it's a very cold day, try filling your child's bottle with hot water, which will then be a nicer temperature to drink as the day unfolds."

Part 2. In the Woods

How the day unfolds

For our longer Monday to Thursday sessions, the day begins with children being dropped off at the play park at the foot of Letham village between 8.30 and 9.15am. There is a car park at the village hall, opposite the play park, which parents and carers are welcome to use during drop-off and pick-up.

Once all of the children have arrived, they gather in a circle with the staff and share a song or two, before strolling up through the village, to the entrance of the woods. Here, the group will stop to consider the weather, the wind and the temperature, and choose the best place to set up base camp for the day. We have established fire pits set up throughout the woods, tarpaulins for shelter if needed, and a yurt with a log burner, for those very rare days when the weather is especially challenging. Some sites in the woods are perfect for shade on hot, sunny days; others are ideal for protection from the wind. The children quickly become familiar with each of our base camps and which will be best on a given day.

Once at base camp (usually at one of the places marked on our map, which children are given when they start), rucksacks are cast off and play begins to gently unfold, while a staff member sets up an area for toileting (with a tarp for privacy and shelter, and a portable composting loo).

Lunch time is ushered in with a song at around 11.30am (walking up the hill to the woods is hungry work!), and the group eat together in a circle, sometimes around a cosy fire at one of our fire pits, if it's cold. The staff and children share stories together over lunch, and gradually, as tummies are filled and lunch boxes tidied away, play resumes once again.

Another song around mid afternoon signals snack time (we provide a healthy snack for all of the children), and the group gather again for a little more nourishment before dispersing back into their games. Then between 3.30 and 4pm, the children slowly emerge from play, have story time with Flopsie (our much-loved toy rabbit) and begin to scoop up their belongings. They sing some final songs together, and make their way back down through the village to the park, where they can play until they are collected between 4.30 and 5pm.

On our Friday half-day sessions, the same routine unfolds, albeit condensed into a shorter time frame, with the day beginning at the play park at 9am sharp, lunch taking place at 11am, and the session ending back at the park again at 1pm.

What we provide

When your child starts, we will provide them with a hi-visibility vest with the Secret Garden logo on it, and a tube containing a Secret Garden poster, a map of the woods, and our two curriculum spirals, all to keep.

In addition, we will loan to your child a good quality rucksack and a sitting mat, which are to be returned to the nursery when they leave.

What we ask you to provide

Before your child starts, we ask that you kit them out with appropriate outdoor clothing and footwear (see the Kit List in Part 4).

We also require you to provide your child with a packed lunch and water in a re-usable drink bottle (we will provide the afternoon snack, which typically comprises rice cakes and fresh fruit, as well as a hot lemon drink on the colder days). We would also ask that you observe, as far as practicable, our healthy eating policy - a home made lunch with minimal wrapping is ideal, and please, no junk food. In the colder months, many of our parents like to provide their children with a small thermos flask containing a hot meal - great for nourishment and for keeping spirits high!



Part 3. Fees and Pre-school Funding

Our Fees

For the 2019-20 nursery year, our daily fees at the Secret Garden are:

Monday - Thursday, 8.30am - 5pm (8.5 hours)	£44
Friday, 9am - 1pm (4 hours)	£24

From August 2020, these will increase to £45 and £25 respectively.

We also ask for a non-refundable booking fee, payable on application. This is currently £50. As of August 2020, there will be no booking fee and children who enrol from this time will instead be liable for an administration fee for when they change days or attend for extra days. This fee will range from £10 to £25 depending on the amount of additional administration required.

Our Invoices

We invoice parents/carers to coincide with Fife Council terms/school holidays.

This means that for 2019-2020, invoices will be calculated as follows:

- Term 1 will be 19th August – 18th October 2019 (invoices sent out in July 2019)
- Term 2 will be 21st October 2019 – 3rd January 2020 (invoices sent out in September 2019)
- Term 3 will be 6th January - 17th April 2020 (invoices sent out in December 2019)
- Term 4 will be 20th April – 24th July 2020 (invoices sent out in March 2020).

Termly invoices will be sent out to parents/carers via email and can be paid in instalments or in a lump sum depending on preferences. It is worth noting that due to there being a different number of weeks, and different holidays, in each term (and council funding not currently paying out during the holidays*), fees will fluctuate between the 4 terms.

*From August 2020, it is possible for you to elect to claim funding over 52 weeks of the year.

Pre-school Funding

Fife Council provides approximately 600 hours per year of funded childcare to eligible children of pre-school age (see below for eligibility criteria). As the Secret Garden is a Fife Council partner provider, parents are able to use some or all of their child's funding entitlement to offset their fees. Funding can be split between the Secret Garden and another nursery (either local authority or another partner provider), within certain criteria and limits, described in greater detail below.

Eligibility for Pre-school Funding

All three and four year olds are eligible for pre-school funding from the academic

term following their third birthday, in line with the qualifying dates below:

- Children who turn 3 between 1 March and 31 August are eligible for funding from the start of the August academic term.
- Children who turn 3 between 1 September and 31 December are eligible for funding from the January academic term.*
- Children who turn 3 between 1 January and the last day of February are eligible for funding from the April academic term.

*Please note that the October academic term is not counted by Fife Council as a qualifying 'term' for pre-school funding.

Criteria and Limits

Fife Council pre-school funding works out at 15 hours and 50 minutes per week, for the 38 weeks of the academic year (adding up to approximately 600 hours per year). You can claim all or part of this at the Secret Garden, within the following limits:

- If your eligible child attends the Secret Garden for two full-day sessions or more, you can claim up to the full 15 hours and 50 minutes. Please note that currently there is a small top up fee for eligible children claiming their full hours at Secret Garden so a child attending for two full-day sessions would require to pay a top-up of £12.05 for each funded week.
- If your eligible child attends the Secret Garden for one full-day session and the Friday half-day session, you can claim a maximum of 12 hours. (Fife Council allows you to claim a maximum of 8 hours against a single full day, and a further 4 hours may be claimed against the shorter half day.)
- The minimum amount of funding you can claim per week, at any one nursery, is 2 hours and 30 minutes. However, your child must be attending nursery for over 6 hours per week to claim any funding, so if your child only attends the Secret Garden on a Friday, you would not be eligible to claim.

If you intend to split your child's funding between the Secret Garden and another qualifying nursery, it is advisable to speak with the other nursery before making a decision, as their funding criteria may differ from our own. This is particularly the case when the other nursery is a local authority nursery, where funding is more commonly allocated in prescribed blocks of time, rather than by the hour.

As of August 2020

As of August 2020, all eligible children will be entitled to 1140 hours of funded early learning and childcare per year. This can be used over 52 weeks or during the academic year only. If it is elected to claim over 52 weeks then the maximum entitlement is 21 hours and 50 minutes worth of funding per week which can be allocated to one nursery or several nurseries of your choosing (split placement). This means that:

- If your eligible child is attending the Secret Garden for three full-day sessions or

more, you can claim up to the full 21 hours and 50 minutes. For an eligible child attending more than 21 hours and 50 minutes a week, there will be a top-up fee payable to cover the additional hours attended (ie 3 hours and 40 minutes for a child attending 3 full days).

- If your eligible child is attending the Secret Garden for two full-day sessions and our half-day Friday, you can claim up to 21 hours. (From August 2020, Fife Council will allow you to claim a maximum of 10 hours against a single full day (our days are 8 and a half hours long), and a further 4 hours may be claimed against the shorter half day).
- The minimum amount of funding you can claim per week, at any one nursery from August 2020, is 2 hours. However, your child must be attending nursery for over 6 hours per week to claim any funding, so if your child only attends the Secret Garden on a Friday, you would not be eligible to claim.

How Pre-school Funding fits into our Billing

We must have all your intended hours for Secret Garden in advance so that we can apply for funding on your behalf. We calculate the total you are entitled to and deduct this from your bill. We use an online accounting system (SAGE) and so all calculations are clearly marked and labelled for you to understand. Once the funding is calculated and taken off the bill, a bill for the remainder (if there is any) is sent out for payment. If you ever require some assistance with understanding your bill, our finance team are always happy to assist - please contact them at finance@secretgardenoutdoor-nursery.co.uk.

Applying for Pre-school Funding

We will apply to Fife Council on your child's behalf for any pre-school funding you wish to use at the Secret Garden, provided that you have completed, signed and returned to us the Pre-school Funding application form (to be found within our enrolment pack), along with proof of date of birth for your child, and proof of address for yourselves. We require all of these before your child starts. We will then deduct the requested funding from your fees invoice, as described above, and Fife Council will reimburse us directly, on a termly basis.

What's in an hour?

An 'hour' of Fife Council pre-school funding is currently paid out at a rate of £4.80, regardless of the actual cost of an 'hour' at a given nursery. This is worth keeping in mind as you work out your costs, as an hour of Pre-school funding does not entirely cover the cost of an 'hour' at the Secret Garden. As such, it is easier to consider pre-school funding as a monetary amount.

We await confirmation from Fife Council as regards the new hourly rate from August 2020.

Equal Opportunities

We will endeavour to include any child at the Secret Garden but there may be certain additional needs that make play in the outdoor environment more challenging than we can accommodate. In certain rare instances, we may just not

be able to accommodate the specific needs of a child within the structure of how the nursery operates. The Secret Garden will ensure that all possible methods of support are explored and continuous discussions with parents take place before such a conclusion is reached.

Confused? Just ask - We're here to help

We understand that pre-school funding can be a complicated business, and we are constantly learning new things about it ourselves! If any aspect of it leaves you baffled, or even just a little unsure, please give us a call or drop us a line and we will do our best to clarify things.

Part 4. Kit List

Winter Days

Footwear

- Please ensure that wellington boots are fleece or neoprene lined - essential for warm dry toes in the winter! (Lighter boots will suffice in the warmer months).
- One or two pairs of thermal socks will help to keep toes warm. Welly boot socks over the top of thermal socks can also help ensure that ankles don't get exposed to winter chill. (Please note that cotton socks don't provide an adequate level of warmth - thermals are essential in the cold weather).



Rest of body

- Thermal base layer with long sleeves and trousers. Peak to Street (www.peaktostreet.co.uk), Little Trekkers (www.littletrekkers.co.uk), Trespass and Marks & Spencer all stock good children's thermals, as do any number of ski-wear shops.



- At least two more upper body layers with long sleeves. The last of these should be a warm fleece or wool jumper.
- Cosy trousers, or two layers of lighter trousers. These can be worn over the top of the thermal base layer.
- A final waterproof layer: top half. If the final waterproof layer has its own additional fleece or padding, please adjust the clothes worn underneath accordingly. It is well to note that not all ski-type jackets are fully waterproof - we need 100% waterproof top layers for Secret Gardeners!



- Final waterproof layer: bottom half.* Waterproof dungarees or trousers. Dungarees are good for keeping children 'together' - no cold tummy. However, they have a disadvantage for some children when it comes to toileting. We encourage the children to help each other get dungarees pulled back up and to do up clips - by themselves. Lots of good fine motor co-ordination skills! Waterproof trousers make toileting easier but please ensure that they have an effective elasticated waist. Raindrops (www.raindrops.co.uk) and Muddy Puddles (www.muddypuddles.com) trousers are very good. We also recommend our local Keela factory shop in Glenrothes (www.keela.co.uk). You can call them for opening times on: 01592 777000. We do have occasional discounts available from Keela. Please contact the office if you would like further information.

**Please note when buying waterproof over-layers that it's better to have a size too big rather than a perfect fit, as there needs to be freedom for movement in the legs and hips. There's nothing more annoying for a child than being prevented from climbing a tree because they can't get their knee high enough due to tight waterproof gear!*

- Gloves and hat. When it comes to gloves, our experienced parents recommend several pairs of cheap 'magic' gloves, rather than one pair of quality gloves. Children's gloves can quickly become wet, and it is best if they can swap for a dry pair when required. Gloves also have a habit of going walkabout, so cheap and replaceable is best! A cozy fleece or wool hat is also a necessity for the colder months. Again, a spare in the bag is a good idea.

Warmer Days

At the beginning of Spring, the weather can be very changeable, so it is always better to start the day over-dressed, with the possibility of peeling layers off. Once the weather improves and we seriously start to lose the layers, trousers are still preferable to shorts, due to nettles and other 'jaggy' things - brambles and thistles for example.

Come the summer, we still ask that children come prepared with waterproofs packed in their rucksacks, as what might start out as a beautiful sunny day can easily surprise us later with rain. Even on a dry day the ground in the woods can remain wet and muddy, and some children can be really put off by damp legs and bottoms!

The Secret Garden will supply your child with a good quality rucksack and sitting mat, on loan, for the duration of their time at the nursery.

Check list

Fleece/neoprene wellies for winter (+ lighter boots for warmer weather)	
Thermal socks	
Wellyboot socks	
Thermal base layer (long sleeved top and trousers)	
2 upper body layers (fleece or wool for top layer)	
1 pair of cosy trousers or 2 pairs of light trousers	
Waterproof jacket	
Waterproof trousers or dungarees	
Several pairs of cheap gloves	
Warm fleece or wool hat	

Part 5. How to Enrol

If you would like to enrol your child at the Secret Garden, please complete all of the documents contained within our enrolment pack, which comprises an enrolment form, a pre-school funding form, two appendices relating to safety and hand hygiene, and finally an 'All About Me' form. (If you do not wish to claim pre-school funding, please write 'N/A' at the top of the form, and return anyway, so we know you've decided not to.)

Enrolment Checklist: Please ensure you provide us with everything listed below, so that we can complete your child's enrolment:

Completed Enrolment Pack	
£50 booking fee (no booking fee is paying if enrolling after 31 st July 2020). We can accept a cheque or cash, or if you prefer to make a bank transfer, please see the enrolment checklist at the back of the enrolment forms for account details.	
Copy of proof of date of birth for your child	
Copy of proof of address for yourselves	

Things to remember before submitting

If you are planning to split your child's pre-school funding entitlement between the Secret Garden and another nursery, please consult your child's other nursery before deciding how best to split the funding.

Please take care to fill in the section in our enrolment form asking for details of your child's health visitor. This is essential for us, and if you are unsure, the information can usually be found on the first pages of your child's red NHS health record book.

Following your initial enquiry, we will invite you to visit the woods with your child as a first step. This is an opportunity to meet the staff, watch the children at play, allow your child to step into play if they wish, and for you to ask any questions you may have. You are also welcome to explore the woods with your child, after your visit.

Should you then wish to proceed, we would ask you to return the enrolment paperwork, along with everything else in the checklist above. Following receipt of these, we will invite your child to return to the woods for a two-hour pre-start visit, which usually takes place one week before their first day, and on a day that your child will be attending, so that they can spend some time with staff and children they will ultimately be with. You are encouraged to leave your child with the group on this visit, and they will have an opportunity to eat lunch and play with the other children.

The following week, your child will come along for their first day, at which point they

will be given their hi-visibility vest, rucksack and sitting mat. You will also be given a tube to take home, containing our poster, map of the woods, and curriculum spiral documents. Your child will be assigned a key worker in their first weeks, and you will receive feedback from them at set points throughout the year. We also send out a weekly parent email with news and photos from the woods, and you are welcome to join our closed Facebook group (let us know if you would like to do so, and we can send you an invitation).

We look forward to welcoming you and your family to our Secret Garden community!

Part 6. 'Into the Middle of Nowhere'



In 2010 acclaimed film-maker Anna Ewert made a short film about life at the Secret Garden Outdoor Nursery from the perspective of the children attending. The film, which won Best Documentary Short at the 2011 San Francisco Golden Gate Awards, beautifully captures all of the magic and wonder of free play in the woods.



We hold occasional viewings of the film, such as at our Information Evenings, and would welcome you to join us for our next viewing.