

The Secret Garden Outdoor Nursery Day Care of Children

Letham Village Hall
Letham
Cupar
KY15 7RS

Telephone: 01334 652276

Type of inspection: Unannounced
Inspection completed on: 16 March 2018

Service provided by:
The Secret Garden Outdoor Nursery

Service provider number:
SP2006008688

Care service number:
CS2008176034

About the service

This service was previously registered with the Care Commission and transferred its registration to the Care Inspectorate on 1 April 2011.

The service is provided outdoors using the countryside, including woodland, to the North West of Letham village in Fife. The main 'base' is in an area of field, used in agreement with the landowner and local farmer. There is a cultivated patch within this area where vegetables, fruit and flowers are grown. Equipment, including rope swings and other play materials, storage boxes and a yurt are also sited in this area. Areas of the surrounding countryside are also used, including other local woodland sites. The recreational park in the village is used as a meeting point between 8:30am and 9am where children spend time at the beginning and end of each session. This park contains a range of permanent large play equipment. The nearby village hall provides some storage and is also available for emergency use, such as in extreme weather conditions.

The service has an office in nearby Cupar where documentation and files are kept. The aims of the service are stated as follows:

'In the unique location of Letham Woods the staff and volunteers of The Secret Garden Outdoor Nursery assist in the unfolding and intrinsic worth of each child.

We aim to:

- Create opportunities for children to learn and discover through play
- Develop an awareness of nature, the changing seasons and rhythms of the year.
- Develop each child's sense of worth in relation to the world around them.'

The service registration states that care may be provided to a maximum of 28 children age from 3 years to 16 years, of whom no more than 18 may be of pre school age, no overnight care may be provided, adult: child ratios will be maintained as follows:

- From age 3 until of an age to attend Primary School 1:7
- Primary school age up to age 7 1:8
- Age 8 and upwards 1:10
- Two adults will be in attendance at all times.

What people told us

There were 11 children attending the service at the time of this inspection. We saw that children were happy, relaxed and busy at play in the outdoor environment and some of the children talked to us about the activities they were involved in. Children's comments included:

'I love coming to the woods - it's so relaxing - and peaceful'

'Look - we're building a swimming pool in our house - it's at the back - in our garden - these leaves can be the water'

'I climbed really high - did you see me?'

'Do you want to come on my train? You need to sit down so that you don't fall - Where do you want to go? - I'm going to Kirkcaldy'

'It was hard going up that big hill - I kept going in the muddy bit - it was all slippery'

'This is our special house - it's secret'

'I'm digging this pile - but the wind keeps blowing it back'

'We're playing a funny game'

'You have to hide - he is the catcher'

We provided the service with ten Care Standards Questionnaires (CSQs) for parents of children using the service. Five completed questionnaires were returned to us before the inspection. All parents who completed our questionnaires 'strongly agreed' that they were happy with the quality of care and support their child received while in the service and reported most favourably on all aspects of the service. Their comments about the service included:

'I feel privileged that my child can attend Secret Garden as it offers a truly unique experience. It seems clear that Secret Garden will impact on my child's relationship with nature long-term, as well as his self-confidence.'

'The staff take great delight in each child as an individual, celebrating and encouraging everyone's uniqueness and similarities. My daughter is growing stronger and more self-assured, delighting in the world around her. She is more curious about how we impact upon that world. I am very grateful to Secret Garden for the opportunities the have afforded us and only wish that they were able to cater for a wider age group.'

'My son settled at Secret Garden instantly unlike other nurseries/playgroups that he has attended. The staff are very attentive to the children and happily join in the kids games. The staff give daily updates on what the children have been doing that day and genuinely seem to care about the children.'

We also spoke informally to some parents as they dropped off their children at the playpark meeting point who spoke highly of the service, staff and their children's experiences. Some parents choose to travel considerable distance in order to use this outdoor childcare provision.

Self assessment

The service had not been asked to complete a self-assessment in advance of this inspection. We looked at their own improvement plan and quality assurance paperwork. These demonstrated their priorities for development and how they were monitoring the quality of their provision.

From this inspection we graded this service as:

Quality of care and support	5 - Very Good
Quality of environment	5 - Very Good
Quality of staffing	not assessed
Quality of management and leadership	not assessed

What the service does well

The Secret Garden Outdoor Nursery provided children with a natural, outdoor learning setting that offered a diverse, ever-changing environment which supported creativity and innovation. It facilitated child-led play and rich outdoor opportunities that were supporting children's learning and wellbeing very well. There was a relaxed, nurturing and welcoming atmosphere where children clearly felt valued and respected. Families were greeted warmly as they arrived and staff had formed very good relationships with children and their families, who they knew very well.

There was a consistent and well established ethos and approach from staff to support and enable children in their play, with staff making very good use of their observations in their role as facilitators. This approach ensured that play was not interrupted and that adult intervention was used effectively to enhance children's experiences. We saw that staff used positive language and open-ended questioning to extend children's thinking and understanding. These positive interactions were helping children to develop confidence, independence and skills in problem solving and negotiating with peers. Children were learning to develop effective team work, to work things out for themselves, were exploring and investigating and developing and testing techniques and ideas. We saw that children were uninhibited, had time and space to develop their own interests, work at their own pace and play alone or with peers.

Children were actively making choices and seen to be busy and purposeful at play. They had very good opportunities to be imaginative and creative. We saw logs being used as trains, bridges, tables, boats and ladders. A range of imaginative games were initiated from conversations and ideas from children and play flowed throughout the day. Children moved comfortably around the wooded area, discovering new features or interests that prompted new ideas. We saw children building and making things and using sticks, stones and other natural materials to support and extend their play and ideas. The three different sites available to the children provided diverse opportunities and experiences.

Children had excellent opportunities to develop awareness and respect for the natural world. They spoke confidently about weather and its impact on their play and safety and were developing a love of the outdoors. They were interested in things that were growing and noticed changes to the natural environment. We saw that children had excellent opportunities to develop physical skills and awareness of the space around them. They ran, climbed and negotiated steep banks and uneven surfaces with great confidence and agility. The freedom to play and explore enabled children to revisit play and retry, test and challenge themselves which was extending their self-awareness, confidence and self-esteem.

Children were making friendships, learning to consider the needs of others and to resolve any minor conflicts. We saw children encouraging and helping each other and noticing and valuing achievements. One child told a younger child 'I think you can get up there - I can help you - I fall sometimes too but I always get up there - right to the top'. The younger child was clearly delighted when he managed to climb to the top of a steep bank and enjoyed being praised by the child who had helped him. This was a close-knit group of children and there was a sense of belonging and ownership of their wooded area.

Staff had established very good relationships with children, they were kind and respectful and spoke to the children in calm and gentle tones. This nurturing and enabling environment led to very good outcomes for children, who were all seen to be happy, settled and enjoying their outdoor experiences. The staff and manager were enthusiastic and committed to the children and to the use of the outdoor environment for child led play and learning.

Open and approachable relationships had been established with parents and we found that there were a range of opportunities for them to be involved in the service and to be kept well-informed about their children's

experiences and progress. From the feedback we received, parents told us that they 'strongly agreed' with the statement; 'Overall, I am happy with the quality of care the service provides for my child'. Informal conversation with some parents, as they dropped off their children, confirmed that they were very happy with the service and had actively chosen an outdoor environment for their child's daycare service.

Children were keen to show inspectors around 'the woods' and to tell us about some of the experiences they enjoyed. They understood and respected boundaries and had developed a strong awareness of the environment and how to manage risk and their own safety. For example, children were supported to consider the strength and direction of the wind and to use the information to agree the safest area of the woods to use on the windy day of this inspection. We observed good staff supervision on the walk from the meeting point to the woods, where staff had relaxed conversations with children that took account of risks such as traffic and contact with dogs. The group were very well-known in the area and staff reported that neighbours and local people stopped to say hello and talk to the children on their walk to the woods, this helped children to feel included and part of the local community. Risk assessments were seen to be dynamic due to the ever-changing natural landscape and the weather.

Staff treated children as individuals and used what they knew about each child to support their specific needs. A range of documentation was kept at the office base that kept good account of children's needs and progress.

The service had appropriate child protection policy and procedure in place and staff understood their responsibilities to protect children and to support their safety and wellbeing. The designated child protection officer had recently completed relevant training which had reinforced her understanding in this key area. We saw that staff placed strong emphasis on children's happiness and sense of emotional wellbeing.

The slopes, terraces and natural woodland features provided excellent opportunities to support children's physical development, fine and gross motor skills, balance and awareness of space. Children were able, confident and adventurous. We saw the pride in their achievements when they mastered a skill or achieved something important to them, particularly when they had tried something several times and had tested different strategies to reach their goals.

Staff used walkie-talkies on site to ensure effective communication and good supervision of the whole area used by the children. This was carried out very discreetly and without disrupting the children at play.

There was a large yurt, which offered children an area to shelter from the wind or rain and provided heat through a wood burning stove when required; this was not seen used during this inspection.

Children brought packed lunches from home which were enjoyed as a group around the campfire. This was a sociable and relaxing part of the day and we saw that children sat enjoying their food and chatting to other each other and staff. This helped children to feel included, part of the group and supported their friendships.

We concluded that children were happy and thriving in this outdoor environment. The natural woodland environment, well-embedded ethos, fresh air, space and freedom of the outdoors were highly conducive to positive outcomes for children.

What the service could do better

During the inspection and feedback meeting we discussed with the team how they could continue to improve the environment, particularly in relation to the challenges of managing toileting and robust infection control measures in an outdoor setting. We further explored with staff how they could extend comfortable areas for

children to rest and relax and take some peaceful time out from their active day as suggested as an area for improvement at the last inspection.

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.

Inspection and grading history

Date	Type	Gradings
9 Mar 2016	Unannounced	Care and support 5 - Very good Environment 5 - Very good Staffing 5 - Very good Management and leadership 5 - Very good
28 Feb 2014	Unannounced	Care and support 5 - Very good Environment 4 - Good Staffing 5 - Very good Management and leadership 5 - Very good
14 Dec 2010	Unannounced	Care and support 6 - Excellent Environment 5 - Very good Staffing 5 - Very good Management and leadership 6 - Excellent
8 Sep 2009	Unannounced	Care and support 4 - Good Environment 2 - Weak Staffing 2 - Weak Management and leadership 3 - Adequate

Date	Type	Gradings

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