



DOWN IN THE SECRET GARDEN



Vicky Hobba,
Administration
Manager
and Woods
Practitioner, explains
what has been
happening at the
Secret Garden
Outdoor Nursery

Secret Garden Outdoor Nursery was the first fully outdoor nursery in Scotland, and we have been welcoming preschool age children to the magical Letham woods in Fife for over a decade now. In 2018, we introduced our kindergarten stage 'Buzzard' programme for ongoing children who wanted to home-school or had chosen to flexi-school. The Buzzard programme has been increasingly popular, with almost all of our current preschool age children keen to stay on for another year in some form if possible, and, with

similar increased interest from new children wanting to join the nursery, we find ourselves in the wonderful position of being in very high demand. Also, with the introduction of 1,140 hours funding for all preschool age children, our requests for attendance rose from an average of 1.5 days a week to closer to 3. We are delighted to offer the children this more immersive experience in the woods.

We currently find ourselves with a flow of applications eager to have our outdoor learning experience. We are privileged to welcome many of

these children to join us in exploring the woods, living in harmony with nature, being in a place out of time as they grow into themselves supported by our team of skilled woods practitioners, following our guiding principles of Presence, Nature, Play and using our unique Nature as Teacher curriculum.

Being fully outdoors, we were the first Fife nursery to reopen after the first COVID-19 lockdown and we have operated using various models since then, from small groups of eight children with two staff, to a cohort of maximum thirty three with a mini-bubble for our Buzzards, to only being open for our keyworker families during the first two months of 2021. We made the difficult decision at the end of 2020 to stop blended placements as we needed to be sustainable as a business, as well as continue to operate within our Care Inspectorate regulations and COVID-19 guidance. With blended placements being discouraged and requiring more



The children join us in exploring the woods, supported by our team of woods practitioners

negotiation with other settings, we followed the path chosen by some other private nurseries to reduce risk and pause them for the time being.

Our nursery families and children have been amazingly supportive through these various changes and we are hugely appreciative of all they have done. We are in awe of the children who have weathered all of these changes in the last year, just as they have weathered our changing seasons, with amazing resilience, good humour and an ability to remind

us all to delight in the little things we see and experience every day.

Our Training Facilitator, Louise Durrant, runs online and face-to-face sessions for practitioners and parents, including our signature In the Woods immersive one day workshop and classes in the Hand in Hand approach to working with children in the early years, a connection-based approach used by our practitioners since 2015.

• For further information please see our website: www.secretgardenoutdoor-nursery.co.uk

• Contact: enquiries@secretgardenoutdoor-nursery.co.uk
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You may also be interested in reading our Nursery Manager, Sarah Latto's chapter about the Secret Garden in *Play is the Way: Child development, early years and the future of Scottish education (2020) Sue Palmer (Editor)*.