

# Puddleducks Outdoor Nursery Day Care of Children

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**Type of inspection:**  
Unannounced

**Completed on:**  
24 February 2025

**Service provided by:**  
J. Puddleducks Childcare Limited

**Service provider number:**  
SP2004006974

**Service no:**  
CS2024000100

## About the service

Puddleducks Outdoor Nursery is a daycare of children service situated near the village of Dunecht, Aberdeenshire.

The service is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 16 children not yet attending primary school. No more than five children are aged two to under three-years-old.

The service is provided outdoors with access to both woodland areas and an open field. The site has been developed with huts for shelter and a toilet block with changing facilities.

## About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 24 February 2025 between 09:00 and 17:15. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors.

To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included previous inspection findings, registration information, information submitted by the service, and intelligence gathered throughout the inspection year.

This inspection was part of a pilot to test the 'Quality Improvement Framework for early learning and childcare sectors' developed jointly with Education Scotland. As this inspection was part of a pilot, no evaluations (grades) have been awarded.

During the inspection we:

- interacted with three children using the service and spoke with one of their friends and family members
- received four completed questionnaires/survey responses (this includes all types)
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

## Key messages

- Quality assurance and self-evaluation processes were in place and were beginning to support the development of the service.
- Children were cared for by skilled staff who were enthusiastic in providing outdoor learning.
- Children were engaged and happy learners.
- Children were well supported to build their confidence and resilience through a range of outdoor learning experiences.

## Leadership

### Leadership and management of staff and resources

The service had been operating for less than a year and was beginning to grow and attract new families. A shared vision, values and aims with J. Puddleducks indoor nursery helped parents and carers understand what to expect from the service. However, as yet children and families had not been included in their design and review. This meant the aspirations of children and their families were unknown. This was identified in the service improvement plan and ways to consult with families were ongoing.

Well-considered, purposeful self-evaluation was beginning to impact on the service provision. Children were asked on a daily basis what they had enjoyed doing and what they would like to do more of. This led to positive outcomes for children who were offered fun play experiences. Parents and carers had completed a questionnaire and had indicated they would like more involvement in the nursery. As a result, some opportunities for them to take part in nursery activities had been implemented.

The service worked closely with the local authority who provided support and advice. As the service continued to develop, other changes including the development of an indoor play space and breakfast room had been introduced.

Quality assurance and moderation activities were in the early stages of development. Processes were in place to help identify inconsistencies in practice, however, where some areas for improvement had been identified, action had not yet been taken. For example, the nappy changing table was not appropriate and raised the potential risk for children to fall. The manager agreed to address our concerns.

Recruitment practices were effective, contributing to a skilled and motivated staff team. The manager and staff were selected for their roles considering their experience, passion and strengths. Relief staff were provided with good mentoring opportunities to help develop their skills and knowledge. This meant they were well informed about procedures and routines, contributing to consistent care and good quality learning experiences. Staff had completed their initial induction at J. Puddleducks and had undertaken training specific to their role in providing high quality outdoor play and learning experiences.

## Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

Staff were skilled and experienced in caring for young children and demonstrated responsive care to help them feel safe and loved. Staff understood that children needed to feel safe and happy in order to learn and showed an awareness of rights for children's privacy and choice. This helped promote children's confidence and resilience in order to flourish.

Staff were motivated and enthusiastic in their professional development. They had participated in forest school training and were confident in their role to instigate, test and maintain children's natural curiosity in the world around them. There were opportunities to share professional dialogue with staff at their sister nursery, J. Puddleducks. This enabled staff to reflect on their practice and develop their skills and knowledge. However, a record of staff learning and development linked to the service improvement plan was not in place. More use of guidance to encourage reflection and development of practice would be beneficial.

Staff benefitted from support and supervision to celebrate success and learn from mistakes. Staff felt supported by the manager and agreed they were encouraged to work to their strength as part of a strong team. Staff were registered with a professional body and followed the codes of practice. This led to positive outcomes for children and families.

Children were supported by friendly staff who knew them well. Parents commented, "Staff are very welcoming, and so good with the children. They are easy to talk to and want to help the children learn and be comfortable in the nursery." Another said, "My child developed a good relationship with the staff members very quickly due to their warm and kind nature."

Staffing arrangements promoted continuity of care across the day. This included a relief member of staff who regularly worked at the service, helping children build positive attachments and feel safe and secure. Due to the low numbers of staff and children, some staff breaks were spent with the children. Staff were happy to do this and felt it provided opportunities to build trusting relationships.

## Children play and learn

### Play and learning

Children were engaged in a range of fun outdoor play experiences. Parents understood learning outdoors was beneficial and felt children were progressing well as a result. They commented, "I love that the nursery is focused on outdoor learning and play, which is so crucial for children."

Children were able to explore the nearby woods or play in an open field with plenty of room to run freely. They were encouraged to be independent learners and follow their own ideas. For example, they were excited to make a heliport by painting pallets bright yellow. In poorer weather conditions, children were able to access play in the 'Kids Cabin.' This provided children with opportunities to play and rest in a cosy environment. It was a new play space for the children, and ways to make it a more inviting and challenging environment were ongoing.

Opportunities to develop language and literacy skills were enhanced through the play and learning experiences offered. Children had written, illustrated and narrated a story which was captured and recorded digitally. This helped develop their creativity and imagination, and promoted a joy of reading. There were some opportunities to develop early numeracy skills, however, this could be further promoted during daily routines such as when preparing snack.

Staff demonstrated responsive and caring interactions to help children learn and progress. They knew when to engage and when to stand back and observe. For some children, support plans were in place to help build their resilience and independence. This contributed to happy children who were growing in confidence.

Staff used questioning and meaningful conversations to help children process information. For example, children were encouraged to look at insects and remember facts about them. However, there were a few missed opportunities to extend children's thinking and ideas. This meant children were not always provided with enough challenge or depth to their learning.

Planning approaches to support children's progress were in the early stages of development. Staff knew the children and their interests well and used this to plan fun experiences they enjoyed. Staff were aware of the next steps needed to support children in their learning. However, there was limited information recorded to effectively evaluate or plan for each child's progress and achievements, including sufficient challenge or depth of learning.

The service worked collaboratively with families to foster positive relationships and share learning. There were some opportunities for parents to join nursery sessions, and children's learning was shared electronically, helping to keep parents informed about what their child had been doing. One parent commented this could be more frequent. Ways to further develop parental engagement in their child's learning and to support families understand the ethos of an outdoor nursery were ongoing.

## 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)

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