

Bushcraft Bairns Day Care of Children

Comrie Croft
Crieff
PH7 4JZ

Telephone: 07763358443

Type of inspection:
Announced (short notice)

Completed on:
14 August 2025

Service provided by:
Laura Norval

Service provider number:
SP2023000118

Service no:
CS2023000187

About the service

Bushcraft Bairns provides a daycare of children service near the village of Comrie, Perthshire. The service is registered to provide a fully outdoor care service to a maximum of 12 children aged 3 to 8 years at any one time. The service operates Monday to Thursday during school holidays.

Children are cared for in a forest camp site within a woodland area on a farm, Comrie croft. They have access to a composite toilet and hand washing facilities. Children can access areas of Comrie croft including, the flower meadows and market garden. The service is provided by a private provider.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 13 and 14 August 2025. The inspection was carried out by one Inspector from the Care Inspectorate.

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

To inform our evaluations we:

- Spoke with ten children using the service.
- Received and reviewed fifteen completed questionnaires - fourteen from children's relatives and carers and one from a staff member.
- Spoke with three staff and provider.
- Observed practice and daily life.
- Reviewed documents.

As part of this inspection, we undertook a focus area. We have gathered specific information to help us understand more about how services support children's safety, wellbeing and engagement in their play and learning. This included reviewing the following aspects:

- Staff deployment
- Safety of the physical environment outdoors.
- The quality of personal plans and how well children's needs are being met.
- Children's engagement with the experiences provided in their setting.

This information will be anonymised and analysed to help inform our future work with services.

Key messages

Positive, respectful, and nurturing interactions between staff and children were of very good quality and fully supported children to feel loved with a sense of belonging.

Staff were highly skilled, knowledgeable, and experienced in forest learning. This meant all children's needs were being met and they were fully supported to foster a love for nature.

Children were inspired by their surroundings and experiences provided to them, which were of extremely high quality. All children were successful, achieving, and reaching their full potential.

Responsive planning was embedded within the service and staff confidently extended children's curiosities and interests as they occurred. This meant children were motivated to learn.

Parents held the staff team and setting in high regard and valued the opportunities their children experienced.

From this inspection we evaluated this service as:

In evaluating quality, we use a six point scale where 1 is unsatisfactory and 6 is excellent

How good is our care, play and learning?	5 - Very Good
How good is our setting?	6 - Excellent
How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good

Further details on the particular areas inspected are provided at the end of this report.

How good is our care, play and learning?

5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

Quality Indicator 1.1 Nurturing care and support

Children benefitted from staff who valued kindness, respect for others, and cared for their natural surroundings. The welcoming atmosphere was particularly evident in how newer children were seamlessly welcomed into the group. Staff skilfully facilitated introductions through engaging children in fun games which fostered an immediate atmosphere of inclusion and comfort. For example, children were asked to think of a 'nature name' and act the name out for their friends to guess. Children familiar with the setting happily took on leadership roles, supporting new children to feel included by showing them where they liked to play around the forest camp site. Interactions between the children and with staff were consistently nurturing, supportive, warm, and fun. This reinforced the strong sense of community and caring ethos. As a result, children had a sense of belonging, immediately formed positive relationships, and played collaboratively and happily together.

Families filled out a booking form prior to children attending the setting. These included important information on medical needs, allergies and emergency contacts which helped keep children safe. Staff recognised children as individuals. On the walk up to the forest camp, staff asked children about their families and how their holidays had been. They ensured new children were included and asked about their likes and interests. This helped children who had not attended the setting to feel reassured, safe, and secure. We encouraged leaders to enhance the information they gathered on the booking form, to include more detail on children's interests and preferences. This would help provide staff with meaningful information before they met children for the first time.

Staff recognised the benefits of the forest space in supporting the emotional wellbeing and experiences for all children. Observations of play and learning were meaningful. They recognised children's strengths and identified adaptations which enabled children to confidently take their next steps. This resulted in all children being supported to thrive, grow and flourish while being fully immersed in their forest experiences. We asked the service to continue to monitor progress with next steps as part of children's personal plans. The use of digital platforms enabled families to be included and involved in their children's experiences. Families told us, 'Excellent feedback at the end of each session, very personable and highly individual', 'I've found it easy to discuss the needs of my child and I feel listened to and staff give balanced feedback at the end of the day' and 'I felt comfortable dropping them off at Bushcraft Bairns from the get-go. The staff were welcoming and engaging from the minute we arrived'.

Mealtimes were sociable and unhurried. Due to the nature of the setting, staff effectively empowered children to eat at a time and pace that was right for them. They were conscious not to interrupt children's play, and we saw the small group of children collaboratively decide when they would sit together at the camp seating area. Children chose from their lunch bags and staff sat and ate with the children, engaging them in rich conversations. This helped promote their communication skills. When they finished, children told us, they had to close their bags fully and hang them up on the wooden structure, to prevent any insects from getting inside. Mealtimes provided children with choice, and a sense of independence.

Children were kept safe and healthy through practices that supported their wellbeing.

For example, staff demonstrated a sound understanding of their role in identifying, recording, and reporting any safeguarding concerns related to a child's welfare. Staff understood when medication was necessary, and overall medication was managed well. We identified some detail that needed to be added to medication paperwork. For example, staff should record the expiry date of medication they have accepted into the service. This would further support staff to administer medication safely. We signposted our guidance 'Management of medication in daycare of children and childminding services' to assist with this.

We evaluated this quality indicator as excellent, where performance was aspirational with outstandingly high outcomes for children.

Quality indicator 1.3. Play and learning

Children were supported to achieve and thrive. This was evidenced through a highly effective, responsive, and empowering learning environment, that was of outstanding high quality. The children's surroundings deeply enriched and inspired their curiosity of plant's, insects, fungi, birds, and animal's living in the forest. Staff demonstrated expert knowledge on forest learning and consistently used highly effective questioning skills, based on nature which were seamlessly woven into conversations with children. Children's voice was highly valued as floor books evidenced how staff responded to their views, by researching reference books to answer their own questions. As a result, children were empowered to be successful and fully lead their own play and learning. A child showed us a book, about bugs. They told us, 'I wrote this page, it's about all the teeth Slugs have, and their residue -that slimy line, it helps the trees and plants to grow'.

Children were immersed in their play and learning and benefitted from resources and activities provided through nature-based play, real life, and open-ended opportunities. Children enthusiastically used a wealth of natural materials to build dens and fairy houses, learned to tie knots, and worked with real tools. They participated in 'Foraging fun' and cooked on campfires. One child told us, 'Look here, I have built a fairy house today, I was inspired by this part of the tree, and my friends helped make the roof with ferns and moss'. Other children proudly showed us their jewellery boxes; they had made from wood with real tools. On our second visit, children were enthusiastically engaged in a river guardianship study, learning about the rivers ecosystem by identifying freshwater insects. Children discussed their observations excitedly with us and how they differentiated between the Fresh water shrimps, Mayflies, Leeches, and Flat bodied up-wings they had discovered. A child told us, 'Look, this one has three tails' and 'Oh what's this one? It's making a wriggly movement, it's not darting'. Staff expertly and sensitively guided the children's learning while reinforcing care and respect for nature. Opportunities provided to children created a real a sense of wonder, and inspired children while building their resilience confidence and bushcraft skills. Additionally, they created an evident appreciation of nature and enjoyment of wild play.

Families highly valued the setting and the experiences offered to their children. Their comments included, 'Each child is thought about at Bushcraft Bairns in a wonderfully individual way. The variety of opportunities in play are vast, exciting, immersive, and deeply engaging. They nourish each child's personality and help them truly flourish', 'My child has enjoyed learning about which foods they can forage, lighting a fire and woodwork. The staff's training and skills means they are able to engage in activities which carry a higher level of risk which they really enjoy', and 'My child can talk confidently about areas of the forest, the provisions and the routines in the woods', and 'My child has grown in confidence, independence, and adventure. They spend entire days immersed in nature and come back full of deep passion and love for the natural world. Most of all, they are developing a wonderful awareness of their role in looking after nature and natural places and how important they are, they do all this while developing healthy relationships with peers and adults, who role model adventurous play, kindness and sharing and a deep respect for nature'.

An excellent example of nature-based play was a game created by the children called 'Orien-tree-ing'.

This child-led initiative, using the Ogham alphabet to identify trees was rich in both numeracy and literacy opportunities. It evidenced the children's deep engagement with nature, cultural heritage and demonstrated outstanding levels of creativity and collaboration. The game was developed into a published educational resource and made available to the wider early years and outdoor learning sectors. This was testament to the setting's exceptionally high commitment to respecting children's voice and their ideas. This innovative practice fully recognised and valued children as contributors and leaders of their own, and others play and learning.

Families and children benefitted from a deeply inclusive community, which was clearly evident within the setting. For example, A local playgroup and national groups were invited to the camp to experience the inspiring opportunities and learning the forest provided. Zen yoga classes, musical concerts and birthday parties in the forest were also available for families. This resulted in children who were proud to share their experiences and learned about their local and wider communities.

How good is our setting?

6 - Excellent

We evaluated this key question as excellent, where performance was aspirational with outstandingly high outcomes for children.

Quality indicator 2.2. Children experience high quality facilities

The forest camp site provided children with a wondrous environment which fully promoted their curiosity and sense of wonder. The camp, covered by a canopy of large trees was on a hill which continuously challenged and developed children's physical ability and confidence. Areas of play were creatively divided by large structures made of willow and ferns and large pieces of tarpaulin, well placed around the camp enhanced the welcoming environment. Climbing structures made from natural materials, placed on slopes and tree swings provided children with additional physical play. Hammocks to the side of the camp enabled children to rest and have some quiet time. One child told us, 'These are so comfy, can you hear the water, it calms me'. The main part of the camp, provided the children with a seating area of wooden tree stumps and logs, covered with soft material for comfort. A fire pit enclosed by an exceptionally large wooden structure, created a warm and homely feel while providing safety. The inspiring environment meant children were enabled to actively learn about their wider world. Children proudly showed us around their camp, it was evident they felt happy, and secure in the magical ambience. Children told us, 'This is our happy place', 'Mostly I like making things here', 'I like the nature, being with the trees is special' and 'I feel so safe here, I've hugged a tree, I love it'.

Staff demonstrated a strong commitment to enhancing children's wellbeing through nature, while providing a safe environment. Children's voice was highly valued, they told staff they felt anxious crossing a narrow, wobbly bridge at the entrance to the camp. Positive action was taken and adaptations made to the bridge, made it wider and sturdier to walk along. This demonstrated the inclusive ethos of the setting and resulted in children who felt respected, secure, and told them they mattered.

Children moved around the camp site with ease and were confident of the boundaries that kept them safe. For example, a child told us, 'You need a lady in there as that is where the real tools are' and 'The yellow rope means stop and ask if I need a lady with me.' Staff skilfully and meaningfully supported children to make good choices and judgements about their outdoor experiences. This resulted in children feeling secure and supported their wellbeing and resilience.

Robust and effective risk assessments meant the camp and surroundings were free from hazards and empowered children to connect with nature and navigate positive risk. A parent told us, 'Boundaries are strongly adhered to, and the children are taught to respect these to keep them safe. Tool safety is taught in a similar way and fire safety also. Respect is at the core of all their learning and that is echoed in the beautiful environment they have created for the children on the hill.'

Children's health and wellbeing was very well supported while experiencing the outdoors. Children had access to a composite toilet, a short distance from the camp which protected their privacy and dignity. Handwashing was available with warm running water, and environmentally friendly soap, and tissues. Staff effectively supervised and supported children to wash their hands at appropriate times. This minimised the potential spread of infection and was efficiently consistent with the environmentally sound approach taken by the service.

An established ethos and real strength of the service was their use of waste materials and their commitment to biodiversity and the sustainability. For example, the service used donated waste wood from other parts of the Croft for activities, building dens and structures that formed their camp. They ensured their footprint on their camp and forest would not affect its habitants of animal and plant life. Brides that had their weddings at the Croft were asked if they would like to donate their wedding flowers for children to make paint and use for activities. This meant children were learning and actively involved in maintaining their camp, and the forest and river ecosystems. This award-winning practice was sector leading and we were confident this excellent practice would be sustained and continue to grow.

Overall, the service made excellent use of the forest and all it naturally provided to secure the very best and highest quality outcomes for children and families.

How good is our leadership?

5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

Quality indicator 3.1. Quality assurance and improvement are led well

Earthcare, Peoplecare and Fairshare were the core values of the setting and had been clearly embedded in practice. These were demonstrated through the consistently nurturing interactions and warmth between staff and children. The new friendships that were seamlessly formed, and the sense of adventure, care and love for nature and the forest were observed. This meant children and families experienced an incredibly positive ethos and a strong sense of community.

Visible leaders with strong leadership skills, resulted in staff that had high aspirations for children and were fully confident in their ability to support children to reach their full potential. All staff understood that high quality outdoor play and learning was at the heart of their work. This resulted in a staff team that was invested and committed to providing children with very good outcomes.

The service was in its second year of operation and children benefitted from high quality play and learning, as improving outcomes was at core of development plans. Improvement planning was realistic, achievable, and tailored to meet the needs of children, families, and the outdoor environment. For example, plans to increase inclusion and work with the local school, to enable children who experience challenges to access forest learning sessions were progressing well. We were confident key priorities planned for the year would be achieved.

Leaders had successfully created a shared responsibility to improving outcomes. Meetings with staff following holiday camps empowered staff to take part in professional discussions, share responsibility, and reflect on what they could do better. Staff told us they felt fully involved and supported in their roles and responsibilities in improving outcomes. We asked leaders to keep more detailed records of monitoring and self-evaluation processes. This had been identified by the service and was part of their ongoing improvement work. We agreed, improvement in this area of practice would help staff further, to evidence what is working well and what could be improved. We directed leaders to best practice guidance 'Self-evaluation for improvement – your guide' to assist them with this.

Families left incredibly positive testimonials following their children's experiences in the forest. We asked leaders to consider how they supported families and children to influence development priorities within the setting. This would help them further to contribute to positive change.

How good is our staff team?

5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

Quality indicator 4.3. Staff deployment

Throughout the inspection staff confidently and meaningfully explained to us how playing and learning in nature enhanced children's wellbeing. This was evident in their expert knowledge of outdoor play, their compassion and calm approach with the children. Their love and respect for the natural world truly inspired children to learn. Children were consistently supported by friendly and dedicated staff, who were welcoming and nurturing. As a result, children were fully engaged in learning experiences, happy, and felt loved by the adults who cared for them.

Staff were highly skilled, knowledgeable, and highly trained on the theories and benefits of outdoor play and learning. They were enthusiastic and passionate practitioners who continually trained in aspects of forest learning, biodiversity and sustaining ecosystems. Staff displayed a strong commitment to ensuring the living habitats of the forest were preserved, while nurturing children's curiosities. They confidently told us how their learning was positively influencing children's lives and sustaining the outstandingly high quality of play and learning we observed. This motivational approach resulted in extremely good outcomes for children and families.

Families held the setting and staff in high regard and strongly agreed with the qualities we observed in staff. Their comments included, 'It's the most incredible outdoor setting I have ever seen', 'Unique approach to learning in a beautiful setting', 'Sessions are held on the most beautiful woodland setting with lots of trees where den making, fire building, hammock swinging, fairy house making, river plodging and rock scrambling are all part of a normal day', 'Outdoor education and very engaged, knowledgeable practitioners', 'The people are truly magical with the children', 'Bushcraft Bairns, Laura and the team are truly the best outdoor education I have ever come across and I feel lucky to have it in our local area' and 'One of the most positive aspects of my child's experience at the Forest school is the nurturing and supportive environment'.

Effective staff deployment ensured children were always well supervised and supported appropriately. Staff communicated well throughout the session, for example, when leaving the main camp to take children to the toilet.

This meant children were always accounted for and kept safe. Staff were very respectful and supportive of each other and had demonstrated a respect for nature and the same environmental ethos that aligned with the setting. This created a positive, and happy ambience for children and families.

Families were kept informed of who was caring for their children through verbal discussions and an online platform. This supported families to become familiar with staff. Staff absences were managed well, and staff who knew most of the children and their routines were available to cover for unplanned absences. This meant disruption to children's routines was minimised.

Staff had been recruited safely. We asked the manager to consider how recording could be improved in relation to how they had made decisions around staff's skills and knowledge. Newer staff to the service were supported well in their roles by effective mentoring and an informative handbook. This meant they were confident in their outdoor practice, the values of the setting and the forest learning approach. We encouraged leaders to use the national induction resource, to extend and build on the current induction process. This could be adapted to align with the settings forest school's approach. We agreed this would provide unfamiliar staff with a more robust and reflective induction to support them in their roles and responsibilities.

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.com.

Detailed evaluations

How good is our care, play and learning?	5 - Very Good
1.1 Nurturing care and support	5 - Very Good
1.3 Play and learning	6 - Excellent

How good is our setting?	6 - Excellent
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	6 - Excellent

How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	5 - Very Good

How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good
4.3 Staff deployment	5 - Very Good

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Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

enquiries@careinspectorate.com

0345 600 9527

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