

# Corstorphine Hill Forest Kindergarten Day Care of Children

Corstorphine Hill  
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Edinburgh  
EH12 6UR

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**Type of inspection:**  
Unannounced

**Completed on:**  
28 November 2025

**Service provided by:**  
City of Edinburgh Council

**Service provider number:**  
SP2003002576

**Service no:**  
CS2023000104

## About the service

Corstorphine Hill Forest Kindergarten is registered to provide a daycare of children's service to a maximum of 15 children aged between three years and primary school entry at any one time.

The manager is also the manager of Lauriston Castle Forest Kindergarten, Cammo Forest Kindergarten, and Queensferry Forest Kindergarten.

The service is located on Corstorphine Hill, a public woodland and nature reserve. The service has access to two designated base camps as well as open access to the surrounding area, including the walled garden. A variety of temporary tarpaulin shelters are set up around the camp. This enables children to seek shelter when they choose to, and gives a more a cosy and welcoming feel. Toilet tents are set up in an area away from the play areas to provide privacy for children. The service is close to transport links, nurseries, schools, and local amenities.

## About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 26 November 2025 between 9:30 and 15:15 and 27 November 2025 between 9:15 and 14:00. The inspection was carried out by one inspector from the Care Inspectorate.

This was the first inspection since registration. To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included registration information, information submitted by the service, and intelligence gathered since registration.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke to and interacted with children using the service
- spoke with staff and the manager
- observed practice, daily routines and children's experiences
- reviewed documents relating to children's care and the management of the service
- reviewed feedback from 11 families.

As part of our inspections, we assess core assurances. Core assurances are checks we make to ensure children are safe, the physical environment is well maintained, and that a service is operating legally. At the time of this inspection, no improvements were identified relating to core assurances.

During this inspection we 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, indoors and 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

- Children and families were warmly welcomed into the service, and were treated with kindness and respect, helping them to feel valued and supported.
- An enriching outdoor environment supported children to explore the world around them at their own pace.
- Staff prioritised children's safety, whilst also embracing a positive, balanced approach to risk in children's play.
- Quality assurance, self-evaluation, and improvement planning were meaningful, and having a positive impact on outcomes for children and families.
- Strong teamwork created a safe, well-managed environment where children were consistently supported.

## 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

Leadership	5 - Very Good
Children thrive and develop in quality spaces	5 - Very Good
Children play and learn	5 - Very Good
Children are supported to achieve	5 - Very Good

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

**Leadership 5 – Very Good**

We found major strengths in this aspect of the setting's work, and identified very few areas for improvement, therefore we evaluated this quality indicator as very good.

**Quality indicator: Leadership and management of staff and resources**

The vision and values of the service were clearly embedded in the daily life of the nursery, and effectively guided staff practice. A strong focus on connection to the natural world, resilience, confidence, and exploration were evident throughout the nursery. These values were consistently reinforced through staff interactions with children, and were reflected in children's play, learning, and development. As a result, children's needs, interests, and curiosity remained central to all planned improvements.

Parents spoke positively about their children's experiences. One parent commented, "forest school is absolutely amazing; we can see how it is benefiting our child, and are so happy they are having such a positive experience in early learning".

Quality assurance processes, including monitoring and audits, team meetings, and individual support sessions supported effective self-evaluation. Staff used these opportunities to reflect on their practice, and identify areas for development. They demonstrated a strong understanding of their roles and responsibilities, reinforced by consistent and effective monitoring and management support. The service had a clear improvement plan, with key priorities focused on wellbeing, inclusion, equity, and enhancing engagement and partnership working. These priorities were developed collaboratively with staff and shared with families to strengthen a shared understanding, and promote positive outcomes for children.

Staff showed a strong commitment to continuous improvement, and worked collaboratively to share ideas and reflect on practice. Regular meetings gave staff opportunities to talk about any successes and achievements, discuss any individual children's needs, or next steps and reflect on practice. Children's learning environments were reviewed regularly by staff who consulted with children, to ensure play and learning areas met their needs and interests. Throughout the inspection, staff were open, knowledgeable, and engaged, and they spoke highly of the support provided by management.

The service ensured that the views of children and families informed ongoing improvements. Children's views were gathered daily through group and individual discussions, and the use of floor books to influence planning. Families were engaged through online communication, stay and play sessions, consultations, events, and informal discussions. This feedback meaningfully informed planning and improvements, helping staff ensure that children and their families' voices were central to service development.

The management team recognised the importance of maintaining a stable, skilled workforce to ensure the wellbeing of children and staff. Clear processes for mentoring and supervision were in place, supporting staff development and goal setting to enhance practice. Staff were well supported through regular appraisals and meetings throughout the year. They demonstrated passion and enthusiasm, sharing strengths, learning, and knowledge with each other, which enhanced the quality of experiences for children.

## Children thrive and develop in quality spaces 5 - Very Good

We found major strengths in this aspect of the setting's work, and identified very few areas for improvement, therefore, we evaluated this quality indicator as very good.

### Quality indicator: Children experience high quality spaces

Children experienced a safe, stimulating environment with rich, meaningful learning opportunities. Sessions were designed around their interests, curiosities, and the seasons, giving them appropriate freedom and time to explore. Parents described the setting as offering "freedom, fun, and learning through nature, "and" the experiences our child has are truly magic."

Opportunities for risk-based play was well supported by staff, in helping to build children's confidence and resilience. For example, children using ropes to assist with tree climbing demonstrated growing independence and problem-solving skills. Many children initiated and sustained their own play for extended periods, making choices and exploring at their own pace. Staff were attentive, responsive, and adapted their practice to meet individual needs. For example, staff supported children's interest in water play, providing a range of pipes for channelling water in a variety of different ways.

In the mud kitchen, children created 'dinners' using weeds, rosemary, and mint. Relocating the herbs closer to this area would further enhance children's independence, and access to natural materials.

Children's health and wellbeing were well supported through robust infection control and food safety practices. Handwashing stations were available with warm, running water and soap, and children were consistently reminded to wash their hands before eating and after toileting. Toilet tents were set up in an area away from the children's play areas for privacy. Handwashing was available very close by with warm water. Some queuing occurred at times at the handwashing station before mealtimes; however, the management team told as part of the service sustainability plan, an outdoor tap was to be installed. This would support and improve the process.

Safety was supported through regular risk assessments of the site and surrounding areas. Staff and children worked together to identify and minimise hazards, promoting children's understanding of personal safety. Daily safety reminders were shared each morning during gather time, and visual markers were used to define play boundaries. When leaving the camp for 'adventures', children wore high visibility vests, and a designated child leader helped guide the group, taking the 'Safety SIMOA' elephant on their journey. This was a tool to help reinforce safe movement and risk awareness.

Children enjoyed woodland walks and visits to the walled garden, where they practised climbing, exploring, and observing nature. Children told us they went on "adventures" and enjoyed "rolling down hills". This contributed to their enjoyment and connection with the environment.

Children's and families' personal information was stored securely and confidentially, in line with best practice and legal requirements. Effective record keeping systems ensured information was accurate and well managed.

## Children play and learn 5 - Very Good

We found major strengths in this aspect of the setting's work, and identified very few areas for improvement, therefore we evaluated this quality indicator as very good.

**Quality indicator: Playing, learning and developing**

Children were happy, engaged, and having fun in a rich and enabling environment that offered freedom, space, and time to explore. Children were confident and had fun through a variety of play, learning, and development opportunities which promoted their choice, creativity, and imagination. Experiences included, loose parts play, arts and crafts, storytelling, tree climbing, and 'adventures' in the wider grounds and local community.

Children initiated aspects of their own play, such as setting up a rope swing, which promoted ownership, problem solving, and practical skills like tying knots. Through these experiences, they discussed safety and assessed risks. The natural environment provided open-ended materials that enhanced creativity, physical development, confidence, and wellbeing.

Staff interactions were warm and respectful, and staff were aware of the interests and developmental needs of children. They skilfully extended children's learning. For example, some children were interested in fungus they found on a tree branch. Staff implemented this into a planned opportunity introducing an iPad to research the subject with children, and reflecting their interest. Learning experiences supported language, literacy, and numeracy through books, mark making, and counting. Staff naturally embedded mathematical and language concepts in conversations. For example, during daily gather times, show and tell, and the use of sign language, and visual timetables. These also supported inclusion, routine, and smooth transitions.

Planning effectively captured children's voices, and linked clearly to learning intentions and children's rights. Staff used a flexible, responsive child-centred planning and assessment process to understand and meet children's individual needs and interests, and were responsive to the natural changes occurring within the outdoor environment. They used children's ideas and suggestions to tailor learning, and give children ownership of their play. For example, when children showed interest in robots, staff provided materials for building their own creations, resulting in high engagement and confident play.

Learning journals recorded key events, observations, progress, and achievements. Observations focused on significant learning, and clearly outlined individual next steps. Effective tracking ensured that each child received individualised support, enabling them to learn and achieve well. Strong, respectful relationships with families promoted meaningful engagement in their children's learning.

**Children are supported to achieve 5 - Very Good**

We found major strengths in this aspect of the setting's work, and identified very few areas for improvement, therefore we evaluated this quality indicator as very good.

**Quality indicator: Nurturing care and support**

Children experienced warm, nurturing care from staff who knew them well, and were responsive to their individual needs. Staff demonstrated kindness and respect through positive relationships and connections, showing children they were valued. Parents were very positive of the quality of care provided, and comments they shared included, "the staff are so knowledgeable and passionate, and get to know the children they support. Thank you!", and "the staff are extremely friendly and adored by the children. They make meaningful connections with each child".

Transitions into the setting and throughout daily routines were well planned and sensitively managed. A flexible approach to settling in visits ensured that children's individual needs were met, including extended transitions for those requiring additional support. Daily routines were communicated in advance, and a visual timetable helped children understand and prepare for upcoming activities.

Medication was stored correctly, and was easily accessible when needed. A clear policy, aligned with best practice guidance was in place. We discussed that generic health condition flowcharts may not be suitable for all children, and should be adapted when emergency procedures are not required for minor symptoms.

Personal plans were effective in supporting children's overall health and wellbeing. For example, supporting children's individual needs, strategies of support, medical, and allergy needs. Staff had worked closely with families to review plans, ensuring consistency of care, and had liaised with other agencies to incorporate strategies that promoted children's overall support. This information was reviewed in consultation with families to ensure that this was kept up to date, and enabled staff to be able to respond quickly and sensitively to any changes. Families strongly agreed that they were fully involved in their child's care, including developing and reviewing personal plans.

Children enjoyed mealtimes that were relaxed, unhurried, and sociable. Staff used this time to engage in meaningful conversations, and promote children's independence by supporting them to prepare, self-select, and serve food. Meals were nutritious, culturally appropriate, and aligned with 'Setting the Table' guidance. Water was available throughout the day to ensure that children stayed hydrated.

Relationships with children and families were at the heart of the service. Staff worked hard to create a warm, welcoming environment, where everyone felt welcomed, nurtured, and supported, and promoted positive relationships and connections. This was enhanced through meaningful approaches which included stay and play sessions, sensitive transitions for children, and daily interactions. These opportunities helped support understanding of the benefits of play and learning experiences in the outdoors, and promoted children's wellbeing and development.

Parents commented positively about their involvement within the setting, and shared "I feel totally confident leaving (child) in their care", and "daily feedback, and regular 'Learning Journal' updates keeps us in the loop, and the termly 'cuppa chats' are a great way to discuss progress and any concerns".

## 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).

## Detailed evaluations

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Leadership and management of staff and resources	5 - Very Good
Children thrive and develop in quality spaces	5 - Very Good
Children experience high quality spaces	5 - Very Good
Children play and learn	5 - Very Good
Playing, learning and developing	5 - Very Good
Children are supported to achieve	5 - Very Good
Nurturing care and support	5 - Very Good

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