

*Kindness, Curiosity and
Connection in Nature*

Parent Handbook 2024-2025

Dear Families,

Thank you for choosing Mucky Boots for your child. We hope that this is the beginning of a joyous and long-lasting journey together, and we welcome you into the Mucky Boots community.

This booklet contains both helpful and critical information about who we are and how to make the most of Mucky Boots. There is advice on equipment, clothing and procedures, but also insight into how we support and guide your child as they develop and grow. Please take the time to read this handbook and ask any questions either in person, or by email or phone.

Finally, your child is at the centre of all we do, but children are part of a network of friends, family and other support services. We hope to become another part of that network, to be curious together, in kindness towards each other, and in connection with ourselves, those around us and with our wonderful woodland.

Claire Hudson-Livingstone
Manager

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Contact Information

Manager	Claire Hudson-Livingstone
Service Name	Mucky Boots Education
Registered Business Address	Garden Cottage, Kingcausie Estate, Maryculter, Aberdeenshire, AB12 5FR
Company Number	SCO548239
Care Inspectorate Registration Number	CS2016349631
Office Mobile	07939 547016
Woods Mobile	07376 225989
Email	admin@muckyboots.org
Website	https://www.muckyboots.org/
Facebook Group	Mucky Boots Families 2024-25



“We trust in us, we trust in you,

I am curious, I am kind,

I am me!”

Mucky Boots Morning Mantra

Mucky Boots Introductory Information

Imagine a world where life is unrushed, where curious children take time to look at the beauty of simple things. Adults close by are attentive, nurturing and supportive. Children are free to explore questions, develop theories and form plans. Children can move on at their own pace, there is no music lesson or art teacher to rush for. Children are free to play in the woodland, with all the 'toys' nature provides. There is shelter in the comfortable, cosy bell tent, full of blankets and stimulating, natural materials and books. There are hammocks and mats available for resting after a busy morning of tree climbing, exploring and playing with friends. There is a fire area at The Magic Hat, where children can help to cook a snack for sharing or make some hot drinks to keep warm and cosy.

This is Mucky Boots; a child led, holistic and nurturing kindergarten for children aged 3 to 8 years old. Our children largely play at our base camp home and we have access to the large woodland with a stream, pond, native trees, bogs, diverse terrain and all the wonder that this brings. All day, every day, will be spent outdoors, giving the children time and space to connect with and become part of the natural world around them. Maryculter Scout Hut and church provide us with a base in times of extreme weather, such as when the winds are too high.

We offer funded childcare places for four days per week during the school term and a Holiday Club for up to five weeks annually.



Company Structure and Staffing

As a Social Enterprise business, Mucky Boots Education works for the benefit of the community it serves. Instead of financially rewarding shareholders or a business owner, we reinvest our profits back into Mucky Boots. This helps to keep our service affordable and supports us in delivering high quality experiences. The business is overseen by a Board of Directors which is led by Dawn Ewan, founder and Executive Director.

Our staff team is ever-growing. We are called by our first names by adults and children alike. Instead of saying 'teachers' the children refer to us as 'adults'. The children 'teach' us just as much as any adult can. It is a way to nurture a respect between us all.

Our Team



Dawn Ewan, Founder and Executive Director, works closely with our management team and Board of Directors. Dawn has over 25 years experience working with children and young people as a primary teacher, ASN teacher, carer, nursery teacher, forest school leader and workshop leader. She is Vice Chair of Upstart Scotland and delivers training and support to nurseries and schools across Aberdeen city and Shire, sometimes even further afield! Dawn is a mother of two (12 and 15) and one bonus child (14), who loves to camp and to simply 'be' outdoors. You will see Dawn from time to time in the field and in the woods, she loves to come and play!

dawn@muckyboots.org

Claire Hudson-Livingstone, Manager, joined Mucky Boots in 2020. She has worked with children for over 10 years as a Forest School Leader and trainer, specialising in Early Years. She holds her teaching diploma, and in a previous life worked as a nurse and service manager in the NHS. She has 3 boys (16, 18 & 21), and a husband who is obsessed with his chainsaw. Claire is passionate about how we connect, support and work *with* the children who come to Mucky Boots - imagine being able to share that joy and wonder every day at WORK!

claire@muckyboots.org



Emma King, Depute Manager, has over 20 years working with children; as a primary school teacher, forest school leader, team leader for an ASD playscheme and as a Waldorf kindergarten teacher. She is married with two children, aged 6 and 3. Emma's favourite things to do in the woods are forage for food and medicine. She loves her job and is proud to be involved with tiny humans on big adventures.

emma@muckyboots.org

Stepanka Mocova, Practitioner, is a qualified Forest School Leader, with experience of running forest school sessions for young children. Stepanka works in the Kindergarten and also the Forest Friday sessions. She loves being in nature, learning about plants and their medical properties. In particular, Stepanka has an excellent knowledge of mushrooms; she thoroughly enjoys foraging for mushrooms. Stepanka loves working with children, supporting children to grow, create and learn new skills. Helping children follow their own ideas and interests brings her so much joy. At home, Stepanka enjoys crafts, music, gardening and woodwork.

stepanka@muckyboots.org



Louise Hibbert, Practitioner & Admin Queen, is a trained nursery nurse who has many years experience in teaching swimming and skiing. Her son attended Mucky Boots and Louise just loves that he had the opportunity to spend so much time in nature and the outdoors. She loves connecting with the children, reading stories, singing and creating opportunities for play in nature.

louise@muckyboots.org

Fiona McNally, Practitioner, has worked with children for many years. Fiona is a qualified Early Years Practitioner and is well on the way to completing her Forest School training. She works in the Forest Fridays sessions as well as the kindergarten. Fiona is married and has 3 children. She likes to explore the outdoors looking for wildlife. She loves connecting children with nature.

fiona@muckyboots.org





Abbie Evans, Practitioner, is a qualified Early Years Practitioner and has degrees in MA Educational Studies and BA (Hons) Child and Youth Studies. Throughout these qualifications and experiences, she has developed a passion for nature exploring and outdoor learning opportunities. In the woods she particularly enjoys going on adventures, reading stories and listening and chatting with the children; she works in the Forest Friday sessions as well as the kindergarten. Abbie is happiest when exploring new places and climbing hills.

abbie@muckyboots.org

Kelly Abernethy: practitioner, Kelly is an early years practitioner and has worked in childcare for almost 25 years.

She says the best year working as a practitioner has definitely been this last year at Mucky Boots! It's been fabulous watching the children play and learn outdoors in nature!

Kelly is married with a 7 year old daughter who loves coming to Mucky Boots holiday club.

kelly@muckyboots.org



Mandy Tulloch, Lead Teacher, is a qualified primary teacher, currently completing her probationary year. With an MSc in Animal Behaviour and a BSc in Zoology she has over 25 years experience as an outdoor learning specialist, setting up her own education business, *Mud Pies*, in 2009 to work with schools in Aberdeen and abroad as well as hundreds of families.

She is also a facilitator for the education charity *Learning Through Landscapes* and is particularly interested in getting children and families switched on to the wonders of the great outdoors to have both fun in it and protect it for future generations to come.

Our Vision, Values and Aims



We have taken a long time to find and welcome our vision, values and aims. We had to look under rocks, behind logs and in the long grass to find them, but they are finally here, and we could not be happier.

Vision:

At Mucky Boots we journey with our community as we grow in, with and for nature.

Values:

Kindness, curiosity and connection in nature.

Aims

- ★ Use a gentle, whole-child approach, to meet children's needs so they feel safe to thrive, grow and flourish.
- ★ Nurture compassionate and reflective connections with all members of our community - children, staff, families, neighbours and organisational partners.
- ★ Offer a wild environment, rich in space and time, that gives children opportunities for exploration and to experience awe and wonder in the natural world.

Term Dates

We follow Aberdeenshire Council term dates which can be accessed here: [School term dates and holidays - Aberdeenshire Council](#)

Please also check the 'Local Holidays' link for details of further closures. We are part of the Stonehaven network of schools. Please select '**Lairhillock School**' for correct term time dates.

Family Calendar 2024-245

Please note that these dates were correct at the time of printing and that some dates may change. All families will be notified of any changes.

Term 1

- Monday 19th August 2024 - In-Service Day
- Tuesday 20th August 2024 - Start of Term 1
- **Monday 26th August 2024 - Parent Council AGM - date TBC**
- Thursday 11th October 2024 - Family Harvest Gathering
- Friday 11th October 2024 - End of Term 1
- **KINDERGARTEN CLOSED:**
Monday 14th October to Friday 25th October 2024 - October Holidays
- **OCTOBER HOLIDAY CLUB:**
 - Monday 14th October to Thursday 17th October 2024

Term 2

- Monday 28th October 2024 - Start of Term 2
- Saturday 2nd November 2024 - Open Day
- Saturday 9th November 2024 - Open Day
- **KINDERGARTEN CLOSED:**
Thursday 14th November to Friday 15th November 2024 - In-Service Days
- Thursday 20th December 2024 - Family Winter Gathering
- Thursday 20th December 2024 - End of Term 2
- **KINDERGARTEN CLOSED:**
Monday 23rd December 2024 to Friday 3rd January 2024 - Christmas Holidays

Term 3

- Monday 6th January 2025 - Start of Term 3
- **KINDERGARTEN CLOSED:**
Monday 10th February 2025 - Midterm Holiday
Tuesday 11th February to Wednesday 12th February 2025 - In-Service Days
- Sunday 16th March 2025 - Family Working Bee in the woods
- Thursday 28th March 2025 - End of Term 3
- **KINDERGARTEN CLOSED:**
Monday 31st March to Friday 11th April 2025 - Spring Holiday
- **EASTER HOLIDAY CLUB:**
 - Monday 31st March to Thursday 3rd April 2025

Term 4

- Monday 14th April 2025 - Start of Term 4
- Friday 18th April 2025 - Good Friday Holiday
- **KINDERGARTEN CLOSED:**
Monday 5th May 2025 - May Day Holiday
- **KINDERGARTEN CLOSED:**
Monday 2 June 2025 - Occasional day holiday
- Thursday 3rd July 2025 - Family End of Year Gathering
- Thursday 3rd July 2025 - End of Term 4
- **KINDERGARTEN CLOSED:**
- Monday 7th July 2025 to Friday 15th August 2025 - Summer Holidays
- **SUMMER HOLIDAY CLUBS:**
 - Monday 21st to Thurs 24th July 2025 - Week 1
 - Monday 28th July to Thurs 31st July 2025 - Week 2
 - Monday 4th Aug to Thurs 7th August 2025 - Week 3

Starting at Mucky Boots

Now that you have accepted your place at Mucky Boots, one of the first things parents like to find out about is clothing. Please see our [Kit List](#) below for what will be needed. We have secured some discount codes with brands that we recommend. We encourage you to use our Facebook parent group to share the latest deals on quality kit. Please get in touch with Claire if the cost would be prohibitive to you.

When your child is ready to start with us, you will be invited to join us for some induction sessions. The induction process will look different for each child and whilst we have a minimum of two accompanied half days, we will work with you to meet your child's individual needs as they settle in.

Some children like to bring in toys from the home for familiarity and security. If a child needs a toy to help support their transition into the woods, we can facilitate this during our induction process. To maximise nature play and connection, we gently ask that children keep their home toys at home. It is also easy to lose and very difficult to find toys that are dropped in the wood - we are convinced the forest eats them!

Kit List

"There's no such thing as bad weather, only unsuitable clothing."

We hold a stock of Didrikson's jackets and jacket / trouser sets, as well as backpacks available to buy at cost price. Please ask at your induction days. And the Parent Council holds regular second-hand clothing sales.

We are pleased to announce that we are work in partnership with



[Littletrekkers](#) have been our preferred supplier for the last few years, most of the kit we recommend can be purchased on this site.

When ordering online, Mucky Boots Families will receive a Discount of 15% off!

The discount code is **Mucky15**

All Year Round

All Mucky Boots children need:

- ☐ high-quality waterproofs, 2 piece
- ☐ a Deuter rucksack
- ☐ a sturdy lunchbox,
- ☐ a water bottle, preferably clear
- ☐ a thermos
- ☐ appropriate footwear
- ☐ warm socks
- ☐ top and bottom thermals,
- ☐ a change of clothes in a waterproof bag
(This includes pants, socks x 2 pairs, trousers, pants and a long-sleeved T-shirt).
- ☐ spare plastic bag



A full change of spare clothing is essential. Please place a **waterproof bag** inside the rucksack to protect it from rain or damp ground. Please ensure all trousers and tops are long to avoid ticks, nettle stings and scratches from bushes.

As a new eco-initiative, we ask that families pack a spare plastic bag to return wet or soiled clothing home. This will hugely decrease the amount of plastic bags we are currently using for wet or dirty clothes.

Colder Weather

During winter, children will need considerably more clothing. Alongside the usual kit please provide:

- ☐ A cosy hat
- ☐ 3 pairs of 'magic', stretchy gloves
- ☐ 'eating gloves' (clean, woolly gloves to keep hands warm and dry whilst eating, stored in lunchbox)
- ☐ A pair of waterproof gloves
- ☐ A buff/scarf
- ☐ Multiple thin layers of clothing (as opposed to one or two thick layers)
- ☐ 3 pairs of socks – one thin, one thick, plus spare in the rucksack.

****Top Tip** - In the winter, we recommend buying your child wellies that are a half or one size larger than usual so that they can wear the cosy thick socks comfortably.



Warmer Weather

The summer months require much less clothing. Alongside the usual kit please provide:



- ☐ A sun hat
- ☐ Midge repellent such as [Mosiguard](#).

On sunny days, please apply suncream in the morning. We will reapply at lunchtime with this [aloe vera sun cream](#) unless you have opted for your own suncream on the registration form.

Ticks

We have ticks throughout our woodland. [Lyme Disease UK](#) recommends applying Mosiguard to keep the critters away. Please ensure your child arrives at kindergarten with applied tick repellent on their clothes as well as their skin and hair.

We carry a spray bottle of Mosiguard in our welfare kit. Please ask staff if you would like to use some.

After each Mucky Boots day, please check your child for ticks and remove them as soon as possible using a tick removal device. <https://lymediseaseuk.com/tick-removal/>. We carry tick twisters in our first aid kit. If we remove a tick from your child, we will complete a first aid form for you to acknowledge.

Our Favourite Go-To's for Kit

We recommend these specific items because they work for and with the children but they are pricey. If this presents a barrier to your child's attendance, please let Claire know. We also run a second-hand clothing sale, and have a discount code for our main supplier.

Waterproofs

We love Didrikson's because they are suitable for all year round, wide to allow for layers and have adjustable straps which means your child can use the toilet easily as well as get many years use out of them:

Top tip - We recommend buying the next size up as these waterproofs last forever!

[Didriksons Slaskeman Waterproof Set | little trekkers](#)

Boardman waterproofs have extra cosiness for the winter months:

[Didriksons Boardman Waterproof Set | little trekkers](#)

We also highly rate **Lidl waterproofs**, unlined for year round use and lined for winter use. We will share when they arrive in store...!

Top tip Waterproof trousers should be sitting over wellies, with the strap sitting under the boot to maximise waterproof-ness.

Backpacks

We highly recommend these Deuter backpacks. Not only are they a great size and comfortable for young children but they are strong and sturdy. We can't recommend these backpacks enough.

[Deuter Kikki 8L Backpack | little trekkers](#)

[Deuter 8L Schmusebar backpack little trekkers](#)

The Deuter Junior backpack is a great option for our older (age 5-7), children:

[Deuter Junior Rucksack - Violet/Navy | little trekkers](#)

Wellies

Demar wellies are by far the best we have found. They are extremely lightweight, incredibly easy to clean and very robust! This style comes with woollen liners which stay on and cosy much more effectively than the alternative. For warmer weather, just pull the liner out:

[Demar Kids Boys Girls Wellies Wellington Boots Rainy Snow Ultra Light EVA Graphite](#)

Water Bottles

We recommend using clear water bottles as they allow staff to check how much water has been drunk throughout the day and at mealtimes.

What size? Child size bottles (eg 330ml) which fit in the side pockets of their backpacks are ideal. We will provide top ups of drinking water when required rather than you needing to provide a large bottle. Please bear in mind that the children carry their belongings in and out of the woods so we recommend considering the materials and weight of their water bottle, lunch box containers and food flasks. If all made from metal these can be heavy for little ones joining us. Luckily there are lots of eco-friendly lightweight products available and our existing parents can recommend tried and tested products in our private Facebook group. The children attach their lunchboxes to the outside of their bags.

*****Top tip*** - some families like to use a clip to ensure the water bottle stays attached to the outside pocket.

Food Flasks

Either of these flasks [FUNtainer® Food Flask 290ml](#) or [Stainless King™ Food Flask 470ml](#) are great for keeping food hot. Baked beans, dinner leftovers and soup are all very popular for warm tummies!

Hot Drinks Flasks

This [Light and Compact Flask 350ml](#) flask is a perfect size for winter drinks and has an easy to push button on the top for pouring:

****Top tip** - heat the flask up with boiling water before putting in the hot food or drink, it helps hold the temperature of the food warmer.

Lunch Boxes

These will be thrown into big tubs for storage and likely dragged around at some points too so it is important to have something robust! They will certainly get quite dirty too! Lunch Boxes are attached to backpacks so we recommend going for something slimline with a handle in the middle. These are our favourite style: <https://thermos.co.uk/eco-cool-lunch-kit>. Thermos offers 10% off your first order, please visit their website for details.



We recommend purchasing a reusable compartment lunch box. It makes lunches look more appealing and it is easy for the children to access. We also find that it minimises the chance of losing lids and reduces washing-up at the end of the day.

Hand Warmers

During the colder months, some families choose to provide hand and feet warmers.

We find that children need the warmers first thing in the morning when the temperature is at its lowest. Some families also like to pop warmers in lunchboxes too. The most eco-friendly are the rechargeable ones that can be found anywhere online. Some members of staff have [this one](#), which as long as it stays dry, is an excellent purchase. There are a variety of hand warmers that you add to hot water to reset each time you use, which are cheaper and more waterproof. Please label your warmer.

Thermals

Layers made from Merino Wool are especially recommended. You can purchase top and bottoms all year round from: Mountain Warehouse, Spotty Otter, Little Adventure Shop, Little Trekkers, Muddy Puddles, Decathlon and Didriksons Thermals. Seasonally from: Marks and Spencers, Aldi, Lidl and.

[Didriksons Jadis Thermal Set | little trekkers](#)

[Didriksons Monte Fleece Jacket | little trekkers](#)

[Didriksons Monte Fleece Pants | little trekkers](#)

Gloves and Hats

Didriksons gloves and hats are great for staying on and keeping hands and heads warm and dry:

[Didriksons Biggles Cap | little trekkers](#)

[Didriksons Biggles Mittens | little trekkers](#)

[Didriksons Biggles Zip Mittens | little trekkers](#)

Magic Gloves - nice and stretchy for growing hands. Found in most pharmacies and Spar stock them for £1 per pair (experience tells us to stock up on many pairs as these are frequently 'magically' lost).

A clean pair of Magic Gloves in the children's lunch box can be worn whilst eating so hands don't get cold.

*****Top tip**** - *layering up a pair of magic gloves under the waterproof ones can keep hands really toasty!*

Cosy socks

Marks and Spencer do a good range of thermal socks. We also love [Heat Holder](#) socks for winter. Please use the discount code **HJAHFAF10 for 10% off** your order.

Please ensure wellies have enough room - squashed socks cannot provide warmth.

Recommended Shops

Mountain Warehouse, Spotty Otter, Little Adventure Shop, Little Trekkers, Muddy Puddles, Decathlon, Aldi, Lidl, Sports Pursuit

Lost Property

PLEASE LABEL EVERYTHING!

No matter if it is done with permanent pen, stitch or pre-bought labels, we really appreciate that all items, down to tupperware and pants, are labelled. This enormously helps in returning property back to families. Please label all clothes, bags and anything brought into the woods.

Should anything go missing, we have a lost property bag which holds all lost items. Staff will take out the bag at the end of the day at the field for families to look through.

Welfare Kit

We have a 'welfare kit' with us everyday. This includes [Weleda Skin Food](#), Aloe Vera Sun Cream and Mosiguard. We will apply when we feel appropriate, with the permissions obtained through the registration form.

Keep an eye on the Facebook Group: Our families are great at keeping each other informed of when sales are on!

Mucky Boots Families 2024-2025

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1005159637682230>

Dropping off and Collecting Children

Whilst we have defined drop-off and pick-up times, we also know that lives with children are unpredictable, and need to be flexible, so please feel free to drop-off or pick-up at a time that suits you, and please feel free to change this as needed

Staff will check your child into Mucky Boots on arrival. Please let us know if there will be anyone other than the usual parent or carer collecting your child. You will have noted a password on your child's registration form, please ensure you pass this on to anyone who is unknown to us.

Morning meet

Children are met by staff at the Glebe Field, by Maryculter Scout Hut. Children have the opportunity to greet each other in the field and play until we head to the woods. We place great importance on a gentle transition from family to Mucky Boots staff members, focusing on connecting with each child and greeting them warmly.

You can drop your child off between 8.30 and 9.15. One group will leave the field at about 8.50, and the second group at 9.15.

If you will be arriving after this time, please park at the lay-by near to Red Roofs house, and walk into the woods to join us.

Due to safety and gentle transition reasons;

***** Staff cannot take responsibility for children at any other points. The team will not be able to take children as they are crossing and walking alongside roads.*****

Pick up time

Between 4.00pm and 4.30pm.

Parents/carers should come to the Glebe Field, by Maryculter Scout Hut to collect their child at the end of the day. You are also welcome to pick your child up earlier from the woods to fit in with other plans and arrangements. Before you arrive, please check with staff as we may be playing in a different area of the woodland.

Parents/carers must arrive and pick up their child by 4.30pm. We do try to talk with every parent at the end of the day and so we ask that parents arrive before 4.30pm to ensure that meaningful handover conversations can take place.

Absence/Late Arrival

Please telephone as early as possible to let us know if your child is going to be absent or late. We will be in touch if we haven't heard from you by 9.30.

Mucky Boots Woods Phone - 07376 225989 - For daily communications with staff in the forest. Please use this number for late arrivals, absences and any changes to pick up arrangements.

Mucky Boots Office Phone - 07939 547016 - To speak to a member of the management team.



Whatsapp Broadcast - we use this feature of WhatsApp to send out important daily messages such as a move to the Scout Hut due to deteriorating weather, or reminders about upcoming events. Alongside downloading Whatsapp, please make sure that you save our woods phone number to your phone to access this feature.

Absence due to illness

- When children are absent due to vomiting or diarrhoea, they must **not** return until 48 hours after symptoms have stopped.
- Children must also be kept at home while they have an infectious or contagious disease. This includes ailments such as impetigo, scarlet fever or chicken pox etc.
- If you are in doubt about exclusion times, please go to [Is my child too ill for school? - NHS](#) for up to date information.
- Please check your child's head regularly for head lice (we recommend weekly), and notify us if you find any. Current information about treating head lice is available from a local pharmacist.

Food and Drink

We eat *with* the children, enjoying each other's company and coming together for lunch and snacks. This gives opportunities to chat about the importance of food and drinks and a healthy lifestyle.



We follow the National Guidelines [‘Setting the Table’](#). This document provides guidance on packed lunches and the balance of food groups we offer children throughout the day.

Children should only bring milk or water to drink and we request that children do not bring sweets. Warm food and drinks are very welcome during the colder months and we recommend that you purchase two high quality flasks for this purpose. Please do not provide your child with food to share as we may have children with allergies or intolerances.

Mucky Boots provides afternoon tea which is prepared by Ground, a cafe in

Bieldside. In winter times it is usually a vegetable soup and a carbohydrate accompaniment. In summer, it can be oat bars, cheese toasties and fruit. Afternoon tea is always vegetarian with vegan and allergen-free options as required.

Children should bring morning snacks and lunch. To facilitate mealtimes, we ask that parents choose food storage that can be opened easily by your child. Packets can be pre-opened and then sealed by a peg for example. Please try, as best you can, to provide something you know your child will want to eat. We have no food storage facilities and therefore only carry oatcakes and fruit or vegetables as back-ups.

It is difficult for us to keep an eye on how much each child eats, and what they choose to eat. A lunchbox offers a wonderful array of appealing and less-appealing food. Please let us know if you are concerned about the type and volume of food that's being eaten, and we can provide some guidance to your child.

In colder weather, we may also offer a hot drink such as fruit tea or low sugar hot chocolate. When we cook on the fire, we may have toast, scones, or soups for example. For birthday celebrations, our children are involved in preparing Welsh Cake batter to cook on the fire. This has become a lovely tradition, one that all our children look forward to! Please do not send in birthday food treats for your child to share.

Wild Food and Medicine

As a team we are exploring foraging for food from our surroundings. We currently have a list of items that are safe to eat and that all staff can reliably identify.

These are;

- Elderflowers/Elderberries
- Wood sorrel
- Spruce tips
- Birch leaves and sap

We always support the children to forage safely and respectfully. As a way of guiding children to follow their instincts and maintain respect for what we are harvesting, we give them the following guidelines:

- Ask the plant permission to pick it's fruits or leaves
- Take only a little from each plant and none at all if it is all alone.
- Only eat something that an adult has checked beforehand



During the Autumn season, there is an exciting abundance of mushrooms to discover. We ask that the children speak to one of our “mushroom experts” if they want to find out more about a mushroom. We want to pass on curiosity, delight and wonder around mushrooms, without fear. We ask that the children avoid handling the mushrooms themselves as they are there to feed the creatures of the woods. We are motivated to let the mushrooms be as we want to enjoy observing them grow and change. As a team, we would remove any mushroom that would be toxic to eat within our camp, if we felt this could be a risk. However please do not worry about handling any mushrooms. There is no mushroom that can cause unpleasantness by handling alone. As a precaution, we wash our hands after any handling. We made some delightful mushroom spore print pictures last season. This was safe to do so as some of our Mucky Boots practitioners are very experienced with mushroom identification and uses.

As a community, we have begun to learn more about the medicinal uses of plants too. At the end-of-term we used the plantain plant to make an anti-sting and bite lotion. Sometimes we use daisies to help ease a bruise. Whilst there is great benefit in showing the children plant uses and properties, we always use conventional first-aid first during an accident or incident.

We always want to learn more about nature and we are so happy to talk, discover and explore all things nature.

Administration of Medicines

If your child requires any medication during their time with us, please let us know so we can provide the appropriate medical forms in advance for you to sign when you arrive. All medication including inhalers should be handed to staff, clearly marked with your child's name. Medications are stored in a locked cool bag in the woods shed during the day. We cannot accept medications requiring fridge storage; your GP should be able to prescribe an alternative.

Where possible, please request medication which can be given outwith Kindergarten hours. Where this is not possible, parents are required to complete a signed **Authorisation to Administer Medication** form prior to staff administering medications on parents' behalf. This policy includes items such as Calpol, throat lozenges and cough mixture. Medicines will only be accepted if they are in their original packaging. Medicines dispensed by a Pharmacist must have a clearly printed label containing details of your child's name, date, dosage, and duration of the course of medication.

Children with longer-term conditions such as asthma, diabetes or allergies should not be limited from joining Mucky Boots due to these conditions. Please speak to a member of the management team about the support your child will require, and to look at any staff training that may be required.

Emergency Closures / Adverse Weather

There may be occasions where we have to close the service early, for example, such as uncontrolled fire or the weather is deteriorating to a stage which would make road travel particularly dangerous. If this is the case the following procedure will apply:

Unexpected closure:

- We will send a WhatsApp message to all parents to inform you of the situation.
- Please confirm collection arrangements via **WhatsApp** to keep our phone line clear in case of emergencies.
- If we have not heard from you within a reasonable amount of time, we will telephone the emergency numbers you supplied on the registration form.

Adverse Weather: (wind, snow, ice)

We aim to make any closure or part closure decision as soon as reasonably practical. This is never an easy decision but is always based on the safety of our staff and children. This includes ensuring that we maintain the correct staff/child ratio.

- Please be aware that the roads in and around the Kirkton of Maryculter can be particularly icy and are often gritted much later than other roads.
- We may close for the day or part of the day – for example, it sometimes makes more sense for us to travel outwith busy times.
- If local schools are closed, Mucky Boots will automatically close.
- The Manager will seek advice from residents within the Kirkton as to local road conditions, as well as checking local roads information from Police Scotland, Aberdeenshire Council and local Facebook groups.
- Please bear in mind that staff will be attempting to reach Maryculter at the same time of day as you are, once we have dropped off our own children at childcare. We may not be able to respond to messages promptly.
- We will send text messages to all parents and post on the Mucky Boots Family Facebook page should we be considering closure.

It isn't possible to always safely play in the woods. High winds and extreme cold are the main reasons we would stay indoors. In these instances we use the Maryculter Scout Hut, next to the car park, or occasionally, the Church Hall.

Learning and the Curriculum



“We can best help children learn, not by deciding what we think they should learn and thinking of ingenious ways to teach it to them, but by making the world, as far as we can, accessible to them, paying serious attention to what they do, answering their questions -- if they have any -- and helping them explore the things they are most interested in.”

John Holt

At Mucky Boots the children’s development and learning is at the centre of our practice, and we take a very broad view of these ideas. We approach child development in the round, seeing each child as an individual with connections to their family and wider community, and who, with the right support, opportunities and environment will discover, create and develop in ways that meet their needs.

They are learning about their emotions and how they feel in their bodies, they are learning how to invite others to play and how to sustain that play, they are discovering what they enjoy, what they are good at and what they can achieve with practice and effort.

Through this learning they develop skills and knowledge, but more importantly, they develop attributes and self-knowledge that will see them through life; attributes such as strong self-esteem, self-confidence and self-regulation.

The role of the adults at Mucky Boots

The most effective form of learning is self-directed; think of a child learning to walk. The motivation comes from the child and requires very little from the adults in their life beyond catching them when they fall.

We take the same approach at Mucky Boots. We observe the children at play and work, only stepping in when needed. We step in when the situation is beyond the current skill level of the child; we step in when reminders are needed about staying safe; and we provide support when children are getting tired.

Observing progress

At Mucky Boots we use a model of holistic assessment to observe and reflect on each child's development. Developed by the Nature Nurture team at Camphill, we were given permission to use the model 2 years ago, and it enables us to put the right support into place at the right time for each individual child.

We take a team approach to this reflection. Each Mucky Boots adult has their own unique relationship with, and experience of a child, and all adults are responsible for the high-quality care and love of all of our children. Drawing on the experiences of the whole team gives us the most rounded view and understanding of that child.

We also draw on the stories and observations that have been recorded in the children's books. Each child has a book that is their own. They care for their book with the support of their key worker, and it is where the child alongside the MB adults tell stories of experiences and opportunities. Your child's key worker will ensure that your child's journal stays up-to-date.

How do we reflect on each child?

Each child is discussed by the whole team twice a year at the Friday team meeting. If a child is experiencing a period of stress, difficulty or development, they will be discussed more often.

At the Friday meeting the child's key worker discusses one area in which they have seen particular strength and growth, and one area the child would benefit from support. The next steps are then agreed by the whole team.

The Importance of Play



'Play is the work of the child'
Maria Montessori

Our child-centred approach places emphasis on the value of free play experiences for the children in our care. We are there to facilitate play experiences, to manage the routines and 'flow' of the day and to provide a source of inspiration and comfort for the children. We join in with play when invited and sometimes draw the children's attention to an area or discovery, for example caterpillar eggs on the nettle leaves or an icy path. Our nurturing staff spend time 'listening' to the children in a number of ways, discovering where their strengths and interests lie and working together to provide opportunities to further encourage further growth and curiosity.

Connections beyond the child

Parents

We strongly value the relationships we have with parents, families and the wider community.

- Our flexible drop off and pick up times offer opportunities for parents and staff to share information.
- Parents are invited to open days, family events and work parties. We run at least two family gatherings per year, one at Christmas and the other as an end of the year celebration.
- At least twice a year, parents have the opportunity for a more formal discussion with a member of the management team to discuss children's progress (see below).

Children's Books

Children can access their books at any time and they are available to take home whenever you or your child wishes to do so. Families are asked to return the books as soon as possible to ensure they are accessible to children during the kindergarten day.

Family Events

We offer at least 2 family gatherings each year; these are joyous occasions when the whole community comes together to eat, share stories and celebrate. We also organise work parties, inviting families to contribute to the growth of the Mucky Boots site by building willow dens, digging drainage ditches and painting sheds.

Parent consultations

Opportunities will be given on two occasions each year for parents to meet with a member of the management team to discuss your child's experiences and progress in more detail. Notes from discussions are recorded on the children's personal plans and are available for the staff team to view.

This process is intended to complement and not replace conversations which take place with parents regularly during drop off and pick up times. At Mucky Boots we feel it is important to respect each child and family member with our feedback process. Therefore we discuss aspects from your child's day from a strengths-based perspective and when we need to tell you about matters that are more difficult, we make sure that the children or other families are not privy to the matter at hand. If that is not possible we offer a phone call or message later when the matters can remain confidential. We want to keep the end of the day as positive for the child and your family as possible but also ensure that information has been shared effectively.

Mucky Boots Parent Council

The Mucky Boots Parent Council was established in November 2021. The aim of the Council is for parents and staff to come together to enhance Mucky Boots. In a short amount of time the Council has proved to be hugely beneficial and successful. Each month the Council meets online or in-person to collaborate on new projects and fundraising events. The PC always welcomes new members and all parents are welcome to any of their meetings. Please contact muckybootscouncil@gmail.com or speak to Katie Reeve (a returning parent) in person if you would like to join the committee.

Maryculter Woodland Trust

As caretakers of the wonderful space we use, we work very closely with Maryculter Woodland Trust to develop and maintain the woodland for the benefit of the children we work with and the surrounding community. It is an integral part of our work that the children and families collaborate with the Trust to plant trees, plan and develop spaces for play and become involved with the hard work of maintaining the wood. Through this, our children develop a real connection to nature and become the future caretakers of wild spaces. Parents are encouraged to join in with the activities of the Trust, including work parties and events. Information can be found at [Maryculter Woods - Home](#)



Child Protection

'The Guidance outlines how statutory and non-government agencies should work together with parents, families and communities to prevent harm and to protect children from abuse and neglect. Everyone has a role in protecting children from harm.'

'The Scottish approach to child protection is based upon the protection of children's rights. The Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) policy and practice model is a practical expression of the Scottish Government's commitment to implementation of the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This requires a continuum of preventative and protective work.'

National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021

It is everyone's job to ensure that children are kept safe; thus it is a priority for Mucky Boots Education to protect the children and young people in our care. We are required to report any suspected child abuse to appropriate services such as police or social work.

Categories of abuse include:

- Physical Abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Criminal Exploitation
- Child Trafficking
- Neglect
- Female Genital Mutilation
- Forced Marriage

(From the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021)

[National guidance for child protection in Scotland 2021 - gov.scot](#)

Click for more information about;

- [Getting it right for every child \(GIRFEC\) - gov.scot](#) and
- [Safeguarding children and child protection](#)
- Aberdeenshire Council [Report child protection concern](#)

Aberdeenshire Social Work Office, 9-5 Mon to Fri 01467 537111	Outside office hours, call the out of hours emergency service on 03456 08 12 06
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Toileting or weeing in the woods

We have a toilet 'village' for the children and adults. In this area there are two tents for the children; each has a small portable toilet which is regularly changed by staff. These tents are also used for changing children. We also have a private 'pee-tree' for children who prefer a 'wilder' wee. There is one toilet which is specifically for adults. Excitingly, we are in the planning phase for some compost toilets which we hope will be ready for use in June 2025.

A member of staff is always available to help the children at the toilet if they require it, and our focus is on fostering independence with clothing as well as using the toilet. We don't rush the child, we provide support as appropriate and give them time to learn how to manage on their own.

Not all children are ready to use the toilet when they start at Mucky Boots, and it is vital to remember that every child has their own personal toileting 'journey'. For some, the route to dry days and nights is a straightforward one. For others, it is tortuous, lengthy and baffling. And for yet others, there are temporary diversions before returning to their usual pattern. All routes are normal, and are dependent on how the individual child develops - we've known 3-year olds who can explain gravity but still have regular accidents. It's all normal.

Key to this journey is strong and consistent communication between families and staff. When the child is ready to learn to use the toilet please come and discuss this with the staff to make a plan that works for you, and is also possible in the woods.

Please remember that learning to use the toilet in the winter months at Mucky Boots is hard. There will inevitably be accidents, and the layers of clothing make it very difficult for us to tell when a child is wet without a visit to the toilet. Also regular changes of those layers can be frustrating for the child, as well as cold. If you feel your child is ready to learn to use the toilet in the winter please arrange a time to chat to a member of staff so we can plan together.

Where a child requires a nappy please use a regular nappy, rather than a pull-up. Changing a pull-up means all clothes have to be taken off which is best avoided. Please provide nappies and wipes according to your child's needs, and ensure there is plenty of spare clothing.

Naps in the woods

It is tiring starting at nursery. It is tiring being outside in the woods all day. And your child may still be having a nap every day at home. After lunch we read stories and create a quiet, calm space for those who need it. Mats and blankets are offered to those who are tired and space is made in the bell tent for them to sleep.

You may also find that a shorter day is helpful for your child as they settle into Mucky Boots and build up their stamina. Please let us know if you would like to do this.

Moving on from Mucky Boots

We hope to help your child's transition to their school go as smoothly as possible.

During term four we will ask for details of any school you may have chosen for your child.

- When a child is transferring to a different nursery or moving on to school, we will invite the staff to visit Mucky Boots in order to observe your child at play and discuss the transition with our staff.
- We will pass you your child's journal to take to their new setting.
- For families who choose to home educate their child, we will also offer support to those families to identify their child's areas of strength and development.

Concerns and Complaints

At Mucky Boots, we strive to provide a high quality, nurturing environment, which allows children the freedom and opportunity to explore, interact with, and learn about the world around them.

If any parent or carer has any concerns about our service, we encourage you to let us know. It is in the best interests of your child that we work together, building good communications based on trust and respect.

The procedure is as follows:

- In the first instance, talk to a member of staff who will discuss with you and report to the management team. A member of the management team will arrange an opportunity to discuss the matter at hand and collaborate on a plan to navigate the situation successfully.
- If you are not satisfied, you should then bring your concerns to the executive director who will discuss any next steps which need to be taken. Key points from this discussion will also be noted and kept in the complaints record.
- If you are not satisfied that the matter has been resolved, you can contact the Care Inspectorate (and/or Aberdeenshire Council if your child is using funded hours):

Care Inspectorate:

Phone: 0345 600 9527

Web: [Home](#)

Email: enquiries@careinspectorate.com

Aberdeenshire Council Early Years Team:

Early Years Team

Woodhill House

Westburn Road

Aberdeen

AB16 5GB

Email: Eligible2andCensus@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Insurance

Mucky Boots Education holds employers' liability and public liability insurance with Birnbeck Insurance.

No insurance is held by Mucky Boots Education that automatically compensates participants for personal accidents, whether it is an accident occurring within or outwith the boundary of the service. Insurance of this nature, e.g. personal accident, life, private medical, is seen as a parental responsibility. It is your responsibility as a parent to insure your child for personal accident or death if you feel this is appropriate.

Data Protection

In our work with children and their families Mucky Boots will have access to confidential information. It is a legal requirement for Mucky Boots to hold information about children and families using the kindergarten and the staff working for our organisation. This information is used for registers, invoices, emergency contacts, to record learning and experiences, conversations and, occasionally, if staff have a concern about a child. All records will be stored securely in a locked cabinet/computer/online in line with Data Protection legislation.

We are registered with the Information Commissioner's Office to hold data.

All records can be accessed through the Manager, or the Executive Director, or by writing to us.

Payment of Fees

All eligible children are entitled to up to 1140 hours a year of Early Learning and Childcare and a substantial snack or meal. Children are entitled to this funding from the term after their third birthday.

For term-time settings such as Mucky Boots this equates to 30 hours a week (term-time). This can be split across two settings. Any hours above the funded amount (30) will be charged.

We ask parents to contribute a small amount each day towards covering the expenses not covered by the Scottish Government, including resources, snacks, hygiene and cleaning materials, insurances and administrative costs.

Current information about costs can be found here: [Fees Schedule 2024](#)

Invoices will be sent out at the beginning of each term and we request payment by the end of that term. You can choose whether to send one payment or to spread the cost over the term.

You may also be able to apply for Universal Credit to help with your childcare costs. To find out if you are eligible, contact: [Benefits calculator - GOV.UK](#)

Mucky Boots Education also accepts all Employee Child Care Vouchers, which may be available from your employer towards the cost of your kindergarten fees. To find out more visit: [Childcare Vouchers/Tax Free](#) or speak to your employer.

Mucky Boots Kindergarten Terms and Conditions

Key terms

Start Date

If, after enrolment (forms received), you require to delay your child's start date, please note that Mucky Boots Education can only guarantee to accommodate a delay in start date by a maximum of one month. If you request to delay your child's start date by more than one month this will be accommodated where possible. If your request date cannot be accommodated, Mucky Boots Education reserves the right to amend your child's start date to the following August.

Payment of Fees/Child's Attendance

Payment of fees is termly in advance. Bills will be sent out at the beginning of each term and we request payment before the final two weeks of each term. Fees are non-refundable in the event of your child's absence. Fees are normally subject to annual review but may be revised at other times with reasonable notice. Mucky Boots Education reserves the right to charge 5% of the monthly fee for late payment of fees. If you wish to decrease your child's attendance, we require one month's written notice.

Termination Notice/Change of days/hours

One month's notice in writing, or payment in lieu of notice, must be given if you wish to withdraw your child from the kindergarten or to request any change in days or hours.

Start and Finish Times

Mucky Boots Nature Kindergarten operates between the hours of 8:30am to 4:30pm each Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. We are open during Aberdeenshire Council term time, and operate the same in-service and occasional day pattern as the Stonehaven school networks.

Children should be dropped off at the Glebe Field by 9.15am and collected from site **by 4:30 at the latest**. Parents/carers must inform Mucky Boots by 8:45am if their child is not attending that day, otherwise the group will be delayed leaving for the woodland, attempting to contact parents/carers or emergency contacts. If parents/carers are running late they must inform Mucky Boots as soon as possible and staff will make arrangements, either to delay the group or arrange to meet within the woodland.

Children cannot be cared for outwith the stated hours, therefore Mucky Boots Education reserves the right to charge £15 per child for every 15 minutes late in collection.

Confidentiality

All information relating to each child will be treated as confidential and can be examined by parents/carers upon written request. We follow GDPR guidelines for safe storage and retention of data. In cases where a child may be at risk, Child Protection legislation will take precedence.

We enjoy having parents spend time with us at Mucky Boots, and very much encourage this. We trust that all parents will treat observations of children and staff in the strictest of confidence. If you have any concerns or questions at all, please bring this up with present

staff in the first instance. Thereafter, please approach a member of the management team. For complaints, please follow our complaints procedure.

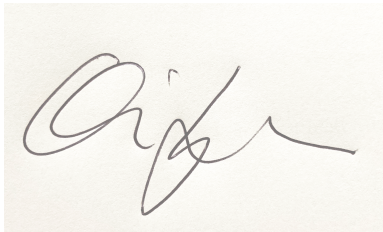
Full terms and conditions can be found at the following link:

Mucky Boots Terms and Conditions 2024

Policies and Procedures will be shared with you on our Google parent drive.

Thank you for taking the time to read through this Parent Handbook. Please do not hesitate to contact us for more information and clarity on the subjects covered either in person, phone or email.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature is stylized and appears to be 'A. J. B.' or similar.

Mucky Boots Education, Garden Cottage, Kingcausie Estate, Maryculter, Aberdeenshire, AB12 5FR ♦ Company Limited by Guarantee ♦ Registered in Scotland no SC548239 ♦ Email: admin@muckyboots.org ♦ Tel: 07939547016 ♦ www.muckyboots.org