

WILLOW DEN

Children's Outdoor Nursery
at The Falkirk Wheel

Information Pack





An Arial picture of Willow Den's main camp

Welcome to the wonderful world of Willow Den!

Our Falkirk nursery is based in the beautiful birch woods at the iconic Falkirk Wheel and is Falkirk's only fully outdoor nursery.

Our vision is for all children in and around Falkirk and beyond to have the opportunity to play, learn and thrive outdoors.

Who we are

Willow Den Children's Outdoor Nursery offers early learning and childcare for children aged 3 to not yet finished primary 3. We are a not-for-profit social enterprise run by Thrive Outdoors, part of national charity Inspiring Scotland.

Opening hours

We are open all year round and offer full and part time places as well as school holiday cover.

Mondays to Thursdays

8am to 6pm

Fridays 8am to 12.30pm

Funded places

As a partner provider to Falkirk Council we are able to offer families the opportunity to use all or part of their child's 1140 funded hours in our fully outdoor nursery. Parents can access 1140 hours of early learning and childcare, with the option for split placements between Willow Den and other providers, including those in nearby local authorities.



Free outdoor clothing!

Children attending two days or more will get a waterproof jacket, dungarees with fleece lining and neoprene wellies from the Spotty Otter Forest Ranger range for free.

Children attending less than two days per week, or would like additional sets, can purchase at a significantly reduced cost. With these suits little ones are set to enjoy Willow Den whatever the weather!



What's on at Willow Den at the Falkirk Wheel

There are opportunities for children of all ages to get outdoors at our nursery, here's how:

Wee Willows

We run a toddler group twice a week on Monday and Friday mornings for wee ones from 18 months to aged 3.

Nurture a love for nature from a young age to create conservation champions of the future!

Pre-school

We offer a unique play and learning experience where children immerse themselves in the wonders of the great outdoors, supported by experienced and qualified outdoor learning practitioners. You can come to Willow Den full or part time!

Funded places are available for those aged 3 until your little one starts school. We follow a child-led approach to early learning and childcare and learning takes place in the best classroom there is - the great outdoors!

“I get asked have they got somewhere warm to go a lot! They'll put the fire on if they are cold and they have plenty of extra layers. It's just about the right clothes.

There is no bad weather, just the wrong clothing!”
- A Willow Den Parent

Bigger Willows afterschool and holiday club

We also offer holiday and after-school care available up to the end of Primary 3. Get in touch with the team to find out more!



We have created a magical and creative woodland setting at Willow Den

From climbing frames to wooded trails, every corner of Willow Den is an invitation to adventure.

At Willow Den, play is the cornerstone of learning. Outdoor play encourages creativity, problem-solving, and physical development. Whether engaged in imaginative role-play or experimenting with natural materials, children are supported to follow their interests and explore at their own pace.

We have:

- Digging area
- Music Wall
- Mud Kitchen
- Physical Station
- Story Den
- Woodwork Station
- Mark Making
- Bug Hotel
- Exploration Zone
- Playdough Station
- Small World
- Large Loose Parts
- Sleepy Hollow
- Raised Beds



High quality learning environment

The Care Inspectorate inspected the nursery in July 2024 and reported 'Very Good' results with significant strengths in care, play and learning, setting and staff team.

The report is available on the Willow Den Website:
<https://www.willowden.scot/care-inspection-report/>



At Willow Den she has been able to find her independence and her confidence since joining and she is excited to go to nursery each day!
- A Willow Den Parent

The team

We have a fantastic team who are passionate about, and trained in, early years education and outdoor play-based learning.

Karen, Tasha, Frankie and Sarah Jane are registered with the Scottish Social Services Council. All staff engage in regular training as a commitment to their continued professional development and the nursery's ethos of ongoing improvement.

Our Falkirk team live locally and are committed to ensuring that all the children in our care are nurtured and have opportunities to achieve and be happy.



Why Outdoors?

Put simply, being outdoors is better for children's health and wellbeing!

Learning outdoors in the natural environment enables children to follow their curiosity and to develop their knowledge and skills across the entire early level curriculum. Research clearly and consistently identifies outdoor play as vital to emotional, physical and mental health and well-being and critical to all aspects of childhood learning and development. That's why our founders, Inspiring Scotland, are working to establish outdoor play as the critical catalyst for healthy childhood development and a fundamental part of growing up.

Outdoor free play

We love play! Free play is a natural part of children's daily experience. Free play in its simplest form can be described as child-initiated play which gives children the freedom to choose what they play with, as well as how and when they do so. We actively promote United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child UNRC.

Willow Den is a place where children can feel empowered, safe and confident to speak up about their needs and wishes.



”

My childhood was filled with outdoor play, being in the woods and imaginative play so I was keen for her to experience something similar.”

- Willow Den Parent



What a day at Willow Den looks like

An outside adventure everyday!

We start our day at the **cabin**- an inside play space and our office. Behind the cabin is our **garden area** where we grow some of our own food, have a small camp fire and our summer house with a stove where we can read or make music.



Our **nature trail** leads the way to **main camp** which is where we can have some breakfast before going for a walk to watch the boats or forage some brambles!

We will have a freshly prepared snack and might gather in our **story den** and sing songs together.

There are **plenty of places to explore** and things to do in camp such as potion making, wood work or mark making. We practise our counting and sorting skills using natural materials.

We can head into **sleepy hollow** for a rest on a bed or hammock, listening to the trees and birds.

Learning Journeys

Children's learning and progress is recorded through observations. These are shared with children and families in floorbooks, wall displays and digitally, through the use of an app.

Meals, snacks and drinks

We follow NHS Scotland's 'Setting the Table' guidance, which aims to ensure that children in childcare settings across Scotland are offered **healthy and nutritious meals, snacks and drinks**. We want children to develop an understanding of where different foods come from. We will grow some of our own food from our garden area and cook with the children so they can experience the food cycle from seed to plate.

Commitment to good environmental practice

Willow Den takes a responsible pro-active approach to looking after our woodland site and minimising the negative impact of our activities on the local and global environment.

We seek to lead by example and promote good environmental practice.



Registration process

2. Join us for a taster visit

There's lots of ways to come and visit us for a look around - arrange a one-to-one show around or join one of our regular free events

1. Get in touch!

Either through our quick online enquiry form on our webpage dropping us an email to FalkirkWheel@willowden.scot or contacting our Nursery Manager on 07940 146 078.

3. Pre-registration

Complete our short online form giving us as much information as you can on the placement you are looking for - this helps us to match you to available spaces and lets us keep in touch with you until it's time to start.

4. Get Registered

Our nursery management team will help you complete all the paperwork

5. Get Funding

Full time, part time, blended or topping up your hours - Our nursery management team will help complete the paperwork.

6. Get Connected

Our team will set you up with your online profile to on our online nursery management system Parent Admin

Fees and Funding

Every child in Scotland is eligible to receive 1,140 hours of funded early learning and childcare per year from the age of 3 until they start school.

You can choose to use your 1140 funded hours with more than one nursery, this is called a split or blended placement.

Parents can access 1140 hours of early learning and childcare, with the option for split placements between Willow Den and other providers, including those in nearby local authorities. This arrangement incurs no additional costs for parents and many children use this option. The team will do all the paper work required for this!

For families requiring more than 1140 hours of childcare, additional hours are available to purchase. This is called 'wrap-around' care. A third of parents in Scotland are now also choosing to use their entitlement to keep their child at nursery and defer starting school for an additional year.

**My child is eligible for
funded hours**

Fully Funded

I want to use all my child's
hours at Willow Den

Choose from our flexible options for
using your full funding

**Complete a Falkirk Council - New Start
Form and hand to the Nursery Manager**

Split Placement

I want to use some of my child's
hours at Willow Den and some
elsewhere

Provide details of the second provider along
with the details of your child's placement.

**Complete a Falkirk Council - New Start
Form and hand to the Nursery Manager**

Non Falkirk Council Residents

Our Nursery Manager and Admin team can help with this.

You will need to complete the 'Funding Follows the Child-Non Falkirk Council Resident Application Form for Funding'.

Please include this along with all other forms for us to submit.

When will my child be eligible for funded hours?

If your child turns 3 between 1st March and 31st July they can access funded hours from the new school term in August.

If your child turns 3 between 1st August and 28th (or 29th) of February they can access funded hours from one calendar month after their birthday. Here are some examples of how a family may choose to use their funded hours.

Jo lives in Falkirk and will turn 3 on 24th June 2025. Their 1140 funding will be available from the new school term in August 2025.

Jo's family registered online for a place with Willow Den by December 2024.

They completed their Willow Den Registration Forms and Funding Application and handed them in to the Nursery Manager at Willow Den so they are ready to submit to Falkirk council by February 2025.

Sky will turn 3 in October 2025, with 1140 hours of funding available from November 3, 2025.

Sky's family registered online for a place at Willow Den by February 2025 and plan for Sky to attend 3 days at another funded setting, using the remaining hours at Willow Den.

They submitted the registration and funding application forms for both settings in February 2025, ensuring to include details about the partner provider and Sky's schedule.

Bobby's family applied for funded nursery hours for him starting August 2025 but are considering changing to Willow Den after seeing how much he enjoys it.

They worry it's too late to switch but the Nursery Team assures them they can still apply to change funding. They complete the necessary registration and funding application forms.

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Get in touch



0131 376 0080



Contact Karen our Nursery Manager
07940 146 078



FalkirkWheel@willowden.scot



www.willowden.scot



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Willow Den is a Limited Company registered in Scotland, No. SC674391, and a wholly-owned subsidiary of Inspiring Scotland (a Company Limited by Guarantee registered in Scotland, No. SC342436 and a registered Scottish charity, No. SC039605).

