# Petition launched to save Middlewood Nursery following inadequate Ofsted rating



A petition has emerged in Sheffield advocating for the preservation of Middlewood Nursery, a forest-based educational facility, which faces potential closure following an Ofsted inspection that rated it ‘Inadequate’. Established in 2014, the nursery has been crucial in providing local families with a unique approach to childcare, however, the recent evaluation has raised concerns regarding its future.

The inspection, conducted in January, reported that four out of the five key educational areas, including the quality of education provided, were rated as inadequate. Sarah Blackell, the owner of Middlewood Nursery and its affiliated 'Forest Schools', expressed her devastation over the news. In a statement, she noted, “I have strived to provide an opportunity for people in the local community to access. I am devastated."

The nursery currently depends on funding from Sheffield City Council’s Funded Early Learning (FEL) programme. According to procedural protocols, the council may withdraw this funding following an inadequate rating from Ofsted. While no final decision has yet been made regarding the nursery’s funding, if it were to be cut, the facility, situated in Winn Gardens, would likely shut down by May 2025.

Parents of children attending the nursery have expressed their discontent over the situation, leading to the petition for intervention. Rebecca Gibson, whose daughter has been enrolled at Middlewood for two years, articulated the distress that the impending closure has caused among families. She stated: “There are around 65 children who now need alternative placements, and with just four weeks' notice, many families are left with nowhere to turn.”

Middlewood Nursery is particularly valued by parents for its holistic educational approach, which incorporates significant outdoor time—children engage in outdoor learning for at least two hours daily. Gibson highlighted the positive impact this environment has had on her daughter, stating, “She was shy and anxious, and struggled to socialise with other children. She’s now confident, happy, outgoing and has even started taking on leadership roles with the younger children. That kind of growth doesn’t just happen, it’s the result of a setting that genuinely cares.”

Despite praise from parents, the Ofsted report raised several concerns about the nursery’s practices, suggesting that the care provided during outdoor sessions did not fulfill necessary safeguarding criteria. The evaluation specifically noted issues such as inadequate provisions for children's warmth during outdoor activities and staff’s failure to recognise when younger children may be too fatigued to walk back from the woods.

Many parents perceive the Ofsted findings as a direct challenge to the forest school methodology, which prioritises child well-being and encourages outdoor exploration much in line with Scandinavian educational models, often cited for their exceptional outcomes. Gibson added, “The forest approach is based on the Scandinavian model, where children's wellbeing is prioritised and where outcomes are some of the best in the world.”

In response to the criticism from Ofsted, the nursery’s management filed a formal complaint, which has been met with continued support from parents. Chief Operational Officer Robin Hindle called the findings “simply not true,” asserting that several elements of the report were inaccurate. “The report should have been issued in February, but we complained that the report contained falsification of information,” he explained.

Subsequently, Ofsted acknowledged the complaint by altering portions of the initial report that was published on April 14. Although the nursery is currently classified under the 'Notice of Concern' process with the council, the funding implications remain unresolved.

As the petition gains traction, nearing 500 signatures, parents and staff await an official response from local authorities regarding the future of Middlewood Nursery.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.change.org/t/school-programs-en-gb> - This URL provides context on school programs and petitions related to nursery closures, which can support the efforts to save Middlewood Nursery. It shows how communities rally to preserve essential services like education.
* <https://www.threads.net/@prdg/post/DHQRk2Pxx3S> - This URL mentions petitions to stop nursery closures, which aligns with the petition for Middlewood Nursery. It highlights the importance of community involvement in saving educational facilities.
* <https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/> - Ofsted's official website would contain information on inspection procedures and ratings, which is relevant to Middlewood Nursery's situation. It explains how inadequate ratings can affect childcare facilities' funding.
* <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/home/social-care/get-involved-in-social-care/funded-early-learning> - This URL provides details about Sheffield City Council's Funded Early Learning program, which is crucial for Middlewood Nursery's funding. It explains how funding decisions are influenced by Ofsted ratings.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted> - This government page on Ofsted explains the organization's role in inspecting educational facilities and the implications of inadequate ratings, which is central to Middlewood Nursery's current situation.