

# **Private East Lothian nursery put back on council partner list**

**A North Berwick nursery removed from East Lothian Council's partnership list two years ago has been allowed to rejoin.**

The Pumpkin Patch was one of four nurseries operated by Bright Stars Nursery Group in the county which were taken off the list of free hour providers used by the local authority in November 2022 after concerns over its 'approach to inclusion'.

But while the three Pear Tree Nurseries, based in Haddington, remain unavailable, the council said the North Berwick nursery was, from today, back on the list.

And operators Bright Stars has confirmed it is now in discussions with the local authority over reinstating the Haddington nurseries on the funded partners list by August this year.

A council spokesperson said: "We have been working closely with the team at Pumpkin Patch and the Bright Stars leadership team to help them embed best practice and meet all of the required national standards in their policies and practice with children.

"This is a condition of funding for all of our funded providers. Pumpkin Patch nursery has become an East Lothian Council funded provider from 6 January 2025."

In November 2022 the council announced it was not renewing its contract with Bright Stars Group, one of its partner providers for its 1140 free nursery hours provision.

The decision meant 151 children who were receiving the free hours had to find an alternative nursery or their parents had to pay the fees.

At the time the council's head of education Nicola McDowell wrote to parents saying concern over the group's "overall approach to inclusion" had raised concerns.

It had been claimed by some parents that concerns were raised after two autistic children attending one of the nurseries, in Haddington, were excluded following an incident early in the summer.

Bright Stars denied there was any policy against supporting additional support needs but said on "very rare occasions" it may have to advise parents it could not provide the support needed.

Last March the group withdrew a bid to have its Haddington nurseries added back onto the council partnership list after concerns were raised over feeding of children at one of its sites.

Care inspectors visiting Pear Tree Nursery Meadowpark in Haddington raised concerns after witnessing a baby who had slept through a scheduled meal time being given tinned soup as an alternative once awake, while some children were left to eat unattended, leaving them at risk if they choked.

A spokesperson for Bright Stars Nursery Group said: "We are delighted that Pumpkin Patch has become an East Lothian Funding Provider and that families can now choose to use their funded hours at the nursery, depending on the spaces available.

“Following our inspection in February 2023 by the Care Inspectorate where we were awarded above the national standards with 4 and 5 grades, our leadership team, and the team at Pumpkin Patch, have worked closely with the council to meet their requirements, and embed best practices at the setting.

“With our Haddington nurseries all awarded the national standard during July 2023 and July 2024, we have registered our interest for all the Bright Stars Group settings in the area to become Funded Providers from August 2025, and the council is now assessing our interest.”

By Maria Sharp Local Democracy Reporter