

Outdoor learning area offers exciting educational boost for Little Ducklings

As a parent, nothing is more important than giving your child the best start in life.

That is why Little Ducklings director Vanessa Shephard and her team of trusted and qualified educators have worked to create a relaxed and inclusive environment that promotes competence, independent exploration, and learning through play.

Following the guidelines of the National Quality Standard, Little Ducklings' flexible approach to learning has seen the centre's enrolment numbers steadily increase over the past year. With summer fast approaching, Little Ducklings is looking forward to celebrating its next milestone when the centre's new outdoor playscape is unveiled next week.

The new learning and development area, which will build upon the centre's existing indoor/outdoor play theme, is set to include a series of river and garden beds, as well as a unique waterworld. The playscape is the first of its kind in Hervey Bay and is similar to the play areas already installed at Little Ducklings in Maroochydore and Riverside.

"Work is set to start on the new playscape this week which will include water play, sports play, interactive barnyard animals, and natural environments - we already have a large outdoor play area with real grass and this new project is just going to improve the experience we offer families," Ms Shephard said.

Ms Shephard has worked in childcare for 12 years and says the facility prides itself on providing the highest quality educational care for each child.

For many children, the daily journey to daycare begins on the Little Ducklings owned and -operated bus each morning. The bus, which is driven by one of the centre's educators, Paula, travels through the various suburbs of Hervey Bay. As the bus pulls in at each stop, Paula and the children enjoy an up-beat mix of rhyming games, songs, and oral learning activities aimed at engaging the children in a fun and educational manner.

"It is the unique things we do that make us number one," Ms Shephard said.

As well as its educational endeavours, Little Ducklings also strives to play an active role in the community and instil in children a sense of social awareness and empathy.

"We most recently partnered with Xavier Catholic College as part of their shoe drive," Ms Shephard said. "As children in Weipa are not able to attend school if they are not wearing shoes, we encouraged families to donate pairs of shoes they no longer needed to the centre which were passed on to benefit the children in need."

The sense of family and camaraderie shared by the children has grown further since Little Ducklings introduced their new uniforms. The brightly coloured t-shirts not only capture the bubbly fun the centre's staff aim to instil in their everyday activities but also give the children an even greater sense of belonging and pride.

"When the children come in wearing their new shirts, they are so excited. We've had one mum send us through a photo of her children sleeping in their uniforms; they were so excited they didn't want to take them off," Ms Shephard said.

Little Ducklings is open from 6.30am to 6.30pm, Monday to Friday and takes children from 6 weeks through to 12 years. Ms Shephard and the team are currently taking enrolments for 2014 with limited places available in each age group. Prospective families can call 4125 4355 or pop in to 19 Southerden Street, Torquay, for a chat and a tour of the facilities.

The Bay's Best Outdoor learning area offers exciting educational boost for Little Ducklings

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Construction of the Little Ducklings new outdoor learning area and playscape will be completed in coming weeks. It will look similar to the playscape at Little Ducklings in Maroochydore (as pictured above and to the right) and promises hours of fun exploring, creating and learning in a relaxed environment.

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Revamp affirms Hoolies' food entertainment reign

With a new menu on the way and its live entertainment program expanding to include a host of acoustic performances every second Wednesday night, Hoolihans Irish Restaurant and Bar has affirmed itself as the Bay's premier venue for quality food and live entertainment.

Located along the Esplanade in Scarness, Hoolies boasts a premium selection of local and imported beers, as well as wine and boutique cocktails, ideal for kicking back and enjoying an afternoon of live NRL and AFL sporting action broadcast from the establishment's four Austar televisions.

While Tamara Meek said menu changes can be expected within the next month - with a new chicken, prawn, and vegetable stir-fry and pasta crowning the hearty menu, its line-up of live local entertainment is set to be given a boost next Sunday, May 25, when the semi-finalists of last year's renowned Hervey Bay Unplugged music competition return to Hoolies' to launch their collaborative album.

Kicking off at 11.30am, Unplugged winners Nicola and Sean Barnes of SeaNic Sounds will be joined on stage by the likes of the 13 finalists who attracted full-house crowds to Hoolihans last year during the competition.

The showcase will run into the late afternoon and caps off an impressive long weekend loaded with good times and entertainment from local band Dust on Friday night.

Having developed a strong family-friendly environment since taking over ownership of Hoolihans in February last year, Mrs Meek said families with young children are welcome to come down and enjoy a meal with their parents.

"Hoolihans is proud of its family atmosphere," Mrs Meek said. "Children can be here until 12am as we are a restaurant and there are no pokie machines. Our lunchtime menu includes something for everyone."

"We have our BLT and chips starting at \$8.50, prawn cutlets and chips from \$19.50, nachos for \$12, and a smoked salmon salad for \$15. We also have a 'dine free on your birthday' deal, where, with proof of your birthday, we will shout you a meal to the value of \$25."

In support of the Hervey Bay community, Hoolihans also donates one dollar from each birthday meal sold to local charity organisations. To date, the initiative has seen Hoolihans donate more than \$43,000 to charities across the Fraser Coast. To book a table phone 41940099 or to view the daily lunch and dinner specials, as well as all upcoming events, visit www.hoolies.com.au and add Hoolihans Irish Restaurant and Bar on Facebook.

