

Case Study: Getting the Best from Outdoor Learning

- The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) can be delivered as effectively outdoors as indoors.
- The outdoors lends itself to many spontaneous and low-cost learning opportunities that can be replicated by parents.
- High quality outdoor learning is considered a strength by Ofsted.

Introduction

Somerset Maintained Nursery in the Wandle Early Years Hub offers sixty full-time equivalent funded early years education places for three and four-year-olds. The two-year-old room offers ten morning and ten afternoon places. The latter are reserved for families referred by the Early Years Multi-Agency Panel and other professionals.

Delivering high quality learning indoors and out

The nursery's ability to deliver a wide range of learning opportunities outdoors was a great strength at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. To minimise risk at that time, it was decided to move all activities outdoors.

Whilst this was a response to the specific situation, there are more generally applicable examples of good practice in the way they deliver the EYFS in an outside environment.

"The outdoor area is our second classroom and we put as much emphasis on outdoor [learning] as [we do on] indoor learning."

Headteacher

To achieve the best possible opportunities for children, the nursery has sought to improve their delivery of learning on an ongoing basis.

In one inspection, Ofsted fed back that the outdoor learning was more teacher-led than indoor learning. This was, in part, because indoors there were equipment and materials that the children could easily access and self-select. In response to this, the nursery installed cupboards with equipment and materials in the garden. This enabled the children to choose activities and materials for themselves.

The nursery does not conceive of the outdoors as the indoors taken outside.

"We don't bring the indoors out, but embrace all the opportunities in all weather. The changes in seasons allow us to explore across the curriculum, even without equipment, or very cheaply.

Headteacher

SUPPORTED BY

MAYOR OF LONDON

Some examples of learning opportunities from outdoors:

- **Mark making:** Instead of trying to create writing opportunities in the outdoors, the practitioners look for opportunities in the activities children are already engaged in. For instance, this can be where a fallen log is in the way and the children are going to saw it into pieces. The teacher can say “Shall we write a sign” (to indicate danger from the saw) and encourage the children to suggest what the sign should say. Another example is giving children messages written on paper to pass on to another teacher. For instance, the teacher can write a message saying that the milk is all gone and could the other teacher check if there is any in the fridge for x child. The message is explained to the child and, in this way the child sees a purpose in writing.
- **Snow:** The outdoor provision has a slope, which lends itself to cheap and enjoyable activities and learning. Nursery staff take out coffee trays for the children to slide down the slope, which is replicable for parents with limited income. This (and other) activity can be used for problem solving with older children.
- **Vegetable and flower garden:** The garden contains endless possibilities for exploring planting and plant growth and types of plants, as well as for healthy eating, hygiene, cooking and shopping. The children plant and care for the flowers and vegetables and then pick, wash, help cook the vegetables on an outdoor cooker and eat the food. If the children have eaten the vegetables, the teachers can then move on to the idea of having to go out to buy more. Then they can organise for a group of children to go out to the local grocers to buy more. This activity would involve also ordering the food and paying for it.
- **Drama:** the nursery has a large store of books, which are used outdoors according to the children’s interests. The outdoor space is used to bring stories alive. Activities such as acting out stories and taking on character roles help the children develop language and early comprehension skills.

The nursery’s use of its spacious and modern indoor areas and well-equipped outdoor space contributed to its outstanding Ofsted rating:

“The indoor and outdoor areas, such as the mud kitchen, large sand areas and road systems, provide excellent opportunities for all children to demonstrate their creative, imaginative and physical skills.”

Ofsted Report

SUPPORTED BY

MAYOR OF LONDON