



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

[www.cymru.gov.uk](http://www.cymru.gov.uk)



# Further steps outdoors

## Guidance



chwarae • dysgu • tyfu  
play • learn • grow

# Further steps outdoors

## **Audience**

Headteachers, teachers, practitioners, governing bodies of maintained schools, and practitioners and management committees in the non-maintained sector in Wales; local authorities; further and higher education institutions; teacher unions and school representative bodies; church diocesan authorities; national bodies in Wales with an interest in education.

## **Overview**

This document provides advice and guidance on making the most of outdoor learning and play everyday.

## **Action required**

None – for information only.

## **Further information**

Enquiries about this document should be directed to:

Early Years Team

Department for Education and Skills

Welsh Government

Cathays Park

Cardiff

CF10 3NQ

e-mail: [earlyyears@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:earlyyears@wales.gsi.gov.uk) or [foundationphaseinfo@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:foundationphaseinfo@wales.gsi.gov.uk)

## **Additional copies**

This document can be accessed from the Welsh Government's website at [www.learning.wales.gov.uk/resources](http://www.learning.wales.gov.uk/resources)

## **Related documents**

*Framework for Children's Learning for 3 to 7-year-olds in Wales* (2008);

*Foundation Phase Outdoor Learning Handbook* (2009);

*First steps outdoors* (Welsh Government and Learning through Landscapes, 2010).

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Planning for outdoor learning and play every day</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Play outdoors</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Observation</b>	<b>9</b>
Recording observations	9
Case study	11
<b>Leading learning outdoors</b>	<b>12</b>
Recognising the value of play outdoors	12
Monitoring and evaluation	13
Staff continuing professional development (CPD)	13
Outdoor play policy	13
Budgets and resource management	14
Parental involvement	15
Case study	16
<b>Making the most of resources</b>	<b>17</b>
Free flow	18
Evaluating provision	19
Case study	20
<b>Language, literacy and communication</b>	<b>21</b>
Resources	21
Stories	21
Writing	22
<b>Fun with mathematics</b>	<b>23</b>
Taking mathematics outdoors	23
Using the digging area	23
Using natural materials	23
Mud kitchens	24
The potential of a metre square	24
<b>Natural materials</b>	<b>25</b>
Resources	25
Small world play	25
Natural artists	26
Sand	26
Keep safe	26

<b>Den building/nooks and crannies</b>	<b>27</b>
Den building	27
Resources	27
Time to build	27
Nooks and crannies	28
What do nooks and crannies offer children?	28
How can we develop nooks and crannies outdoors?	29
<b>Art and creativity</b>	<b>30</b>
Getting started	30
Get messy and work on a large scale	30
Working together	31
Looking for inspiration	31
<b>Music and movement</b>	<b>32</b>
Junk music	33
Sound trails	33
Case study	34
<b>Continuous provision resources</b>	<b>35</b>
Den building	35
Natural materials	36
Art	37
Exploring water	38
Music and movement	39
Literacy	40
Meaningful mathematics	41
Nature detectives	42
<b>Further reading, useful contacts and links</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>45</b>

## Introduction

There is a strong emphasis on outdoor learning through play-based experiences in the Foundation Phase. It is important that the value of this powerful context for teaching and learning is recognised by everyone involved in children's care and education. Increasingly research<sup>1</sup> is demonstrating the benefits for children when they connect with the natural world and are able to enjoy outdoor experiences. The impact on learning and development as well as health and well-being can have long-term benefits.

Experiences outdoors are an essential part of early childhood and play is the most effective and relevant vehicle for providing them. Well-planned activities help children to think and make sense of the world around them<sup>2</sup>. There should be opportunities for children to follow their own interests and lines of enquiry through free play balanced with adult-led activities that support skills development outdoors, every day, whatever the weather.

The outdoor learning environment needs to complement the indoor learning environment. Where possible children should have long periods of time outdoors and be able to freely move between the indoor and outdoor environments. Recognising the potential of such a dynamic, flexible learning place that supports children to take manageable risks and develop a curiosity for the world around them, across all of the Areas of Learning, is key to good practice and provision in the outdoors.

It is crucial that learning and play outdoors are purposeful through careful observation, planning and resourcing. Children need stimulating outdoor spaces and the support of enthusiastic, engaged adults to make the best use of what the outdoors has to offer. Leaders should demonstrate commitment to making the best use of outdoor practice and provision through the culture and ethos of the setting/school. This guidance builds on the information provided in *First steps outdoors* (Welsh Government and Learning through Landscapes, 2010) which focuses on developing outdoor spaces for learning and play. This guidance also looks at developing outdoor practice and provision within the Foundation Phase.

---

<sup>1</sup> See 'Further reading, useful contacts and links' on page 43.

<sup>2</sup> *Play/Active Learning: Overview for 3 to 7-year-olds* (2008)

## Planning for outdoor learning and play every day

Planning and supporting a balance of child-initiated and adult-led tasks is as important outdoors as it is indoors. Without appropriate planning children may not have the opportunities to move on in their development and learning. Time spent outdoors must be purposeful if children are to gain skills and knowledge from playful experiences and make good progress. Children need to be supported outdoors by enthusiastic practitioners who provide and model good quality play so that they don't see it as an opportunity for disorganised playtime.

When thinking about planning for outdoor experiences it may be useful to consider:



- the children's lines of enquiry and interests as well as their ideas for activities
- whether experiences will have more impact on learning if done outdoors
- how learning outdoors can enhance and deepen learning within the Areas of Learning
- which experiences are best suited to a combination of indoor and outdoor learning
- how learning indoors can best be consolidated, progressed or enhanced using the outdoors.

It is important not to focus on one approach to outdoor provision and leaders/practitioners should consider a range of provision. Make use of setting/school grounds, local spaces as well as trips further afield. For example, just relying on focused tasks in forest-based sessions may mean that children will lack the freedom that everyday experiences in the outdoors offers. Ideally, where facilities allow, children should experience free flow, daily access to outdoor provision, with opportunities for child-initiated activities balanced with those supported by enthusiastic adults as well as regular opportunities to access Forest School and off-site experiences.

However, the most important aspects of planning provision outdoors are to give the children space and time to develop their play, learning and understanding. You may note a difference in the approach to learning demonstrated by the children in the indoor and outdoor environments. Outdoors, children are often observed being more absorbed in their own thinking, learning and exploration and so it is important that they are afforded the time to develop their lines of enquiry and skills. How long children spend outdoors will depend on the setting/school, the activities and their levels of engagement but they should be afforded as much time as possible in order to consolidate learning and skills. Also, where possible, plan to allow resources and scenarios to be left in order that the children can return to their activities.

Resource kit	Activity suggestions
<b>Den building</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore and understand properties of everyday materials.</li> <li>• Develop their understanding of planning, designing, constructing, modifying and reflecting.</li> <li>• Role play – can be tied into a topic or theme.</li> <li>• Explore and understand light and dark.</li> <li>• Instructional writing/video clip – how to build a den/natural structure, include digital images.</li> <li>• Connecting materials – fine motor skills, knot tying.</li> </ul>
<b>Art</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create large scale art pieces.</li> <li>• Combine natural and man-made materials in creative ways.</li> <li>• Observational art and drawing.</li> <li>• Rubbings – compare natural and man-made elements, use rubbings to create larger art work.</li> <li>• Collage – ask a child to lie on the floor and draw around them; fill the body shape with gathered natural materials.</li> <li>• Recognise similarities and differences in their own work and that of others.</li> <li>• Explore symmetry and tessellation.</li> </ul>
<b>Music and movement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative movement exploring moods, feelings and repeating actions.</li> <li>• Respond to, explore and understand sound and music.</li> <li>• Explore wind direction.</li> <li>• Use and understand descriptive language.</li> <li>• Respond to and create own directions in movement.</li> <li>• Develop understanding of composition, dynamics, pace, duration and timbre in music.</li> <li>• Explore, create and play simple musical patterns.</li> <li>• Join in with sound stories.</li> </ul>

Resource kit	Activity suggestions
<b>Natural resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use in mathematics activities – counters, repeating patterns and sorting are just a start.</li> <li>• Small world – story making and telling and imaginative play.</li> <li>• Art and creative activities.</li> <li>• Symbolic play.</li> <li>• Descriptive language.</li> <li>• Create a natural number chart.</li> <li>• Create an alphabet poster using natural materials to form letters.</li> <li>• Search outdoor space for natural materials that begin with all or particular letters/blends.</li> </ul>
<b>Exploring water</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See links between cause and effect – ‘If I . . . ?’, ‘What will happen if . . . ?’.</li> <li>• Explore and understand capacity and volume.</li> <li>• Transport water – connecting gutting and piping.</li> <li>• Use water and paint brushes in mark making and letter and number formation.</li> <li>• Exploring time – chalk around child-made puddles on a sunny day; observe what happens over time.</li> <li>• Explore the effect water has on everyday materials.</li> </ul>
<b>Exploring nature</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observe the differences between animals and plants.</li> <li>• Identify animals and plants that live in the outdoors – why not plot them onto an aerial view of your space?</li> <li>• Sort and classify mini-beasts.</li> <li>• Create habitats for mini-beasts.</li> <li>• Explore the effect of seasons on animals and plants.</li> <li>• Carry out their own and adult-led investigations.</li> </ul>

## Play outdoors

Different play theories underpin<sup>3</sup> and support the pedagogy of the Foundation Phase. The understanding of play theories is continually developing and Sobel (2008) offers his own on play in the outdoors. He suggests that seven 'play motifs' can provide a basis for outdoor learning and play experiences. These motifs can be applied to experiences for children of all ages, not just those in the Foundation Phase.

Play motif	Features of the play	Supporting the play
<b>Adventure</b>	Open ended, unknown, creative.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long periods for free, child-initiated play with continuous provision resources.</li> <li>• Risk taking.</li> </ul>
<b>Fantasy and imagination</b>	Escape and play with their imaginations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating stories and role play.</li> <li>• Puppets.</li> <li>• Dressing up.</li> <li>• Welsh myth and legend.</li> </ul>
<b>Animal allies</b>	Connecting with, caring for and understanding biodiversity and eco-systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mini-beasts, pets.</li> <li>• Habitats.</li> <li>• Simple biodiversity.</li> <li>• Life cycles.</li> <li>• Off-site visits to natural spaces.</li> </ul>
<b>Maps and paths</b>	Exploring, following, deciphering.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following and creating maps.</li> <li>• Tracking.</li> <li>• Trails.</li> <li>• Exploring mazes and labyrinths.</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> For further information see *Play/Active Learning – Overview for 3 to 7-year olds* (Welsh Government, 2008) and *Learning and Teaching Pedagogy* (Welsh Government, 2008).

Play motif	Features of the play	Supporting the play
<b>Special places</b>	Nooks and crannies, dens, forts, hiding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Den building – with a kit and/or natural materials, creating shelters and exploring forest/wooded areas</li> <li>• Time away from adult gaze*.</li> </ul>
<b>Small worlds</b>	Creating miniature worlds, representing, story making and telling, symbolic play.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create small worlds within natural spaces.</li> <li>• Planning and designing small worlds.</li> </ul>
<b>Hunting and gathering</b>	Searching, collecting, hidden treasure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hunts linked to topic/theme.</li> <li>• Literacy/numeracy hunts.</li> <li>• Collecting natural materials.</li> <li>• Nature story walks.</li> <li>• Growing, gathering and eating fruits and vegetables.</li> </ul>

\*This can be perceived by the child.

Thinking about these play theories will help when planning a range of learning experiences, as well as thinking about resources, practice and learning spaces, for children outdoors.

## Observation

Observation and assessment plays a vital and valuable role in everyday practice in the Foundation Phase. As well as helping to assess skills development, watching and listening to children helps to establish and understand their views on how, why and where they learn. It also provides a starting point when planning activities and setting up the learning environment, taking into account children's current interests.

When gathering information, observations and assessments it's important to work both indoors and outdoors. It is recognised that the outdoors is a different and contrasting environment to the indoors, providing different experiences and, in some cases, provoking differences in children's behaviour. As teaching environments expand beyond the indoor classroom, so too should observation.

Children in settings/schools may spend a considerable amount of time outside and observing their skills in the outdoor as well as the indoor classroom will help create a whole picture of each individual child. To build a complete, holistic picture of the children, it's not only vital to observe them in both environments over a period of time, but also – when working outdoors – to ask a range of open-ended questions.



“ **It is important to note that not all observations will have a predetermined aim or rationale (in fact, many result from observing). Children may be observed on a daily basis as they undertake their activities. Observing children is equally informative whether the observation takes indoors or outdoors.** ”

Observing Children (Welsh Government, 2008)

### Recording observations

There are many different ways of observing children and recording their efforts and abilities. Some suggestions that can work successfully outdoors include the following.

#### Notebook

A notebook is probably one of the most useful tools. Keep one in your pocket along with a pencil (better than a pen as it won't smudge during rain or water-based activities) so that both are readily available.

#### Diary

Keeping observation notes in a diary can prove extremely useful for evaluating and reflecting on activities – especially when looking to extend the children's learning. As they can be quite bulky gather information using a notebook or other recording method and then copy it into the diary.

## Technology

Digital photographs and recordings (e.g. video, tablet, MP3 and voice recorder) can all be used to document children's achievements and progress outdoors. Visual and auditory recordings are also a useful tool for passing on information to the rest of the teaching team and other children. Bear in mind that the weather may affect the quality of recordings.

## Sticky notes

These are also useful tools in observations, although in hot or rainy weather they may not always be practical to use outdoors. Keep them in sealed plastic bags with a pencil in various spots around your outdoor environment to jot down evidence as necessary.

## Record sheets

These are pre-prepared with identified sections or targets for observing. Again, paper-based evidence like this will need to be protected from the weather. Keep your records in sealable plastic bags to avoid them being ruined by the rain or blown away.

### Listening to children

Evaluate activities or inform observations of how the outdoor space is used by encouraging feedback from the children. You could do this by:

- asking them directly, encouraging them to express an opinion
- taking them on a tour of the space with an intermediary, such as a puppet or a toy, to help gather information
- using 'feelings' tokens so the children can vote on how they feel about a particular feature, space or activity
- reviewing together photographic or video evidence to evaluate activities and spaces
- holding discussions with children in a group during which they are asked to describe features of the setting's/school's grounds they either like or dislike. The words they choose may tell you a lot about their feelings.

## Case study

The playgroup's theme for the term was 'Autumn' and a variety of activities were planned for across the Areas of Learning. It was decided to go on an autumn walk, at the beginning of the term, to introduce the theme with the children gaining first-hand experiences. The children would have the opportunity to gather leaves and acorns and any other autumnal foliage. Practitioners could then introduce and discuss with the children the changes in the seasons and the effects to trees, plants and hibernating animals during this time.



During the walk the children began to pick some blackberries and noticed that the juice from the fruit had stained their fingers. The adults and children discussed how the juice looked like ink. The children asked if they could make some pictures using the juice on returning to playgroup. They then discussed, with the support of the adults, what they could use to crush the berries rather than using their fingers. Following a variety of suggestions the children decided that the best tool to use was a pestle and mortar. The children enjoyed squashing the berries and quickly realised that they need more berries to provide enough juice for making pictures. They experimented with different methods of mark making including using their fingers and using a variety of tools from brushes to sticks. This activity was carried out in the outdoors.

The playgroup has now developed a mark making area outside which is part of their continuous provision. This is as a result of the ideas and response of the children to developing the area using their previous experience. The area is made up of natural materials such as a large piece of trunk for a table and large stones to sit on. Twigs, feathers, leaves and bowls are supplied and the children are encouraged to use natural resources to create paints and inks. A planting area is used for larger mark-making activities with the children using the soil to make mud ink. One member of staff has responsibility for replenishing this area but all staff contribute ideas and are very aware of the importance of recording children's ideas for extending this area further.

## Leading learning outdoors

Outdoor learning and play is an integral part of the Foundation Phase and not an added extra. Leaders of settings/schools have a vital role in ensuring that children have meaningful learning experiences in stimulating, well-planned and safe outdoor environments.

Leadership of the setting/school is integral to successful implementation, development and sustainability of outdoor learning through play. However, headteachers/managers should not be the sole driver of this aspect of practice and all staff should share the responsibility. The vision and commitment of leaders and their team can drive real change to make a positive difference for children.

To ensure good Foundation Phase practice outdoors leaders should:



- spend time in the outdoor learning environments themselves
- create and maintain an indoor/outdoor culture within the setting/school
- recognise and promote the value of outdoor learning and play to staff, governors, parents<sup>4</sup> and children
- allocate a portion of the budget to ensure sustainable outdoor learning and play
- develop, monitor and evaluate outdoor practice and provision
- promote effective outdoor pedagogy through professional development
- involve parents and the wider community where possible.

### Recognising the value of play outdoors

The benefits of outdoor learning and play for children cannot be underestimated. Many studies have shown it has positive impact on children's learning, development, health and well-being. The more active approach to learning can be more engaging and appropriate for some children, in particular boys. The sense of freedom gained from being outside may encourage the quietest children to become more vocal and confident. Often, when asked, outdoors is where children want to be with the freedom to make more mess and noise, or find quiet and calm, as well as explore, investigate, use and develop their senses and skills, take risks and experience challenge.

<sup>4</sup> 'Parent' is used as a generic term throughout this document. It can mean any significant adult that is proactively involved in parenting a child or children and includes mothers, fathers, carers, foster and adoptive parents, guardians and corporate parents.

Being outdoors is not just about developing physical skills and learning about the seasons. All aspects of the Areas of Learning can and should be supported holistically through outdoor learning and play. Practitioners should be encouraged and supported to plan for creative ways of providing literacy based activities, or to look for ways to provide mathematics problems in context. Thinking skills, developed through challenges and questioning, come into their own in the outdoors. Giving children the permission and time to investigate, explore and discover 'What happens if . . . ?' will promote cognitive development. The freedom and the 'have a go' attitude that can be fostered by children outdoors may mean they are observed being more engaged in activities, which in turn will have a positive impact on their disposition for learning. Spending time with the children outdoors will help leaders to appreciate the benefits of this approach to teaching and learning.



## **Monitoring and evaluation**

In order to ensure good practice and maintain standards leaders and managers should make time to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning provision outdoors. Leaders should familiarise themselves with good outdoor Foundation Phase practice. Visiting other settings/schools, talking to local authority advisers, attending continuing professional development (CPD) events and keeping up to date with research and reading will all help to inform evaluations.

## **Staff continuing professional development (CPD)**

All staff need to be enthusiastic about being outdoors; as Foundation Phase practitioners they will have to spend time engaging with children outside. However, children will soon pick up on adults who are disengaged or inattentive and the value and quality of learning and play will diminish. Work with the team to draw on their strengths and skills and provide CPD training and opportunities to all staff as appropriate. Don't forget to include non-teaching staff within this process as it is important they understand this aspect of Foundation Phase provision.

Think about outdoor projects and how they can develop practice and provision. Look at ways to develop excellent or sector-leading practice through action research, parental involvement projects or other ways of raising standards specific to the setting/school.

## **Outdoor play policy**

Consider putting together an outdoor play policy to ensure everyone understands the drive, motivation and philosophy for outdoor learning and play at your setting/school. Give all staff the opportunity to input to the vision for your setting/school so that there is ownership and consistency in practice and provision.

## What should be included in your policy?

- **Vision, aims and rationale** – drawn up in agreement with the whole team at the setting/school.
- **Roles and responsibilities** – include details of who is responsible for different elements of outdoor play, e.g. leadership, resources and storage, maintenance, planting, overall risk assessments.
- **Planning** – explain how learning experiences will be planned for and evaluated; consider including details on child-initiated and adult-led learning.
- **Observation and assessment** – detail how observations will be carried out and used.
- **Parents** – clarify how they can be involved and intended lines of communication.
- **Health and safety** – outline how risk assessments will weigh up the benefit of the play against the percentage of risk as well as details of ‘checking the grounds’ procedures.
- **Weather** – include details of how extreme weather conditions will be dealt with, e.g. details of wet weather clothing available and the application of sunscreen.
- **Resources and sustainability** – explain how continuous provision resources (fixed equipment and resource boxes) will be stored, maintained and replaced.
- **Equality and inclusion** – make clear how all children, regardless of their abilities, will be able to access and experience the outdoors; include respect for cultural issues, e.g. dress and visits to religious buildings.
- **Monitoring and evaluation** – specify how monitoring and evaluation of teaching practice will take place outdoors in order to maintain effective practice.
- **Off-site visits** – include how using areas within the local community and trips and visits will support learning and play.

## Budgets and resource management

Any long-term or major plans for your outdoor practice and provision should be embedded in the setting’s/school’s development plans with specific and measurable targets that improve outcomes for children. Observing and monitoring teaching and learning as well as how resources are used will be useful for establishing if and how things need to be changed. Show commitment by ensuring (as far as practicably possible) part of each year’s budget is set aside for training, resourcing and maintaining the outdoor spaces.

## Parental involvement

Parents should be informed about what and how their children are learning outdoors. Noticeboards, newsletters and 'stay and play' sessions are all ways to demonstrate the skills children are learning and allay fears around risk taking. Take the time to explain the importance of this aspect of the Foundation Phase, the vision and philosophy and help parents to understand why their children may not always go home too clean.

Parents may be more willing to help out at the setting/school if they can be involved in the outdoors. Some adults may feel wary of the more formal indoor classroom or they may have a particular skill, such as gardening or a creative skill, which can support the children's learning outdoors.

Children's progress doesn't stop when they leave the setting/school. They can develop new skills and abilities over the period of a weekend or during the holidays. Asking parents to help keep you informed about their child's activity will build up a complete picture of their abilities and skills. Relevant information can be easily recorded in the form of a quick note, a diary, a pre-prepared sheet and/or photographs.

It is also important to provide parents with ideas about how they can support their children's learning outdoors. Suggest ways to do this within a home garden, local park, forest or beach, or invite them to a training session within the setting's/school's outdoor space to demonstrate and exchange ideas.



## Case study

When the headteacher of an infant and nursery school took up her post she was disappointed to find outdoor spaces that were underdeveloped, under-used and in a poor state of repair. Understanding the importance of this aspect of the Foundation Phase and wanting to embed outdoor learning and play into everyday practice all staff were sent on training courses. The outdoor spaces, including a wooded area and those directly outside the classroom, were evaluated and developed to support focused activities as well as continuous provision.

In order to ensure everyone has equal access to the wooded area a timetable has been implemented. This helps make the most of the time spent outdoors and facilitates exciting opportunities for learning with support from parents and members of the community such as Mountain Rescue and the Ghurkha Regiment.

Many outdoor activities are planned through enhanced provision and all children have free flow access to the outdoors with classrooms now having safe, fenced areas immediately outside. Planning takes place weekly with all staff, including teaching assistants, evaluating outcomes and child progress both indoors and outdoors, and using the information to inform next steps. Outdoor planning also highlights identified National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) skills for particular groups of children to support learning in context.

The headteacher is convinced the stimulating environment and provision have had a very significant impact on children's good standards of achievement and well-being. She feels in particular the learning environment has impacted significantly on boys' performance. In 2013 the end of Foundation Phase assessments showed that overall the boys outperformed the girls by five per cent.

However, it is not only the teaching staff who are convinced. After an open day where parents were invited in to share outdoor learning experiences parents' comments included, "The outdoor facilities are excellent. I hadn't realised how important this aspect of learning was but am very impressed" and "He loves the classes that take place outside. He's just so much healthier than being stuck indoors all day."



## Making the most of resources

Resources are an important part of Foundation Phase outdoor learning and play. The kinds of equipment and materials available to children can significantly affect the nature of the play experiences they have. Provision for outdoor learning and play is not simply a question of taking indoor resources and equipment outside. As an alternative environment for children it is vital they are provided with the resources that help them capture, understand and utilise the special nature of the outdoors.

Continuous provision outdoors can be made up of fixed pieces of large equipment as well as boxes or kits of resources that can be used flexibly to provide and support child-initiated and adult-led learning and activities. The best resources for outdoor learning can cost little or nothing and can have a major influence upon the quality of children's learning and play. Focus on smaller, easily obtained materials that support aspects of provision including imaginative and creative play, exploring water, growing and encouraging language and cognitive development. By selecting flexible resources with high play value, fewer items are actually needed.

The suggested kits<sup>5</sup> should be used as the basis for provision, just as resources are indoors, and enhanced to support themes and topics. Challenges to encourage thinking and problem-solving skills will keep children engaged and offer opportunities to extend learning and development appropriately. Children should also be permitted to mix resources across the kits in order to develop their play and support their application of skills across a range of contexts.

When thinking about resources it is important to consider the best ways to offer holistic learning outdoors. Long-term plans will help to establish what experiences you want to provide outdoors and in turn indicate resourcing continuous provision. Evaluating where your outdoor provision is now will help provide play with a purpose and the 'Evaluating provision' grid on page 19 will help to get you started.

Think about creating inviting, stimulating learning areas outside, just as you do indoors. *First steps outdoors* (2010) provides comprehensive auditing and planning tools as well as advice on capturing the children's ideas and thoughts and suggests ways to consult with children. This will help you to develop appropriate outdoor spaces and support what you want to be able to **do** with the children outdoors rather than investing in equipment that looks nice but can be under-used or have little play value.



<sup>5</sup> Suggested lists of continuous provision can be found on pages 35–42.

It is also essential to think about clothing for both children and adults to support access to the outdoors all year round, whatever the weather. It is wise to invest in the best quality wet weather clothing as possible to ensure value for money. Storing clothing may be a challenge but it is worth finding hanging space at a height that means the children can access it independently. If possible create this near the door to allow a transition zone that will support free flow access between the two learning environments.

## Free flow

While fully recognising that some buildings do not facilitate free flow access to the outdoors only providing timetabled, focused sessions outdoors can be problematic for a range of reasons. These include a lack of child-initiated learning opportunities, abandoned activities indoors in order to get outside, issues with resources when all the children are out at the same time, lack of staff motivation and involvement, and poor opportunities for holistic learning and observation. Where outdoor provision works best settings/schools have found ways to facilitate free flow access between the indoor and outdoor environments and combine the two to promote good quality learning and play opportunities.



The benefits of free flow include:

- sustained periods of learning and play
- improved well-being
- positive impact on behaviour
- a better balance between child-initiated and adult-led learning
- all children have equal opportunities to access both environments
- better use of resources and time as children are used to being outdoors rather than it being a novelty
- practitioners may be inspired to take their own practice further.

Providing free flow access may be a big challenge, but the impact on the children's overall learning and development, as well as teaching practice will pay off.

## Evaluating provision

	What happens now?	How well does this work for us? What limits this?	How can we develop this? What is the potential impact on learning and development?
<b>Fixed and large play equipment,</b> <i>e.g. climbing frames, play houses, wheeled resources</i>			
<b>Continuing provision resources,</b> <i>e.g. den building kit, water resources, art kit</i>			
<b>Enhanced provision resources,</b> <i>e.g. role-play resources, game playing equipment</i>			
<b>Focused provision resources,</b> <i>e.g. tools, specialised science resources</i>			
<b>Storage,</b> <i>e.g. labelling, access for children as well as adults, health and safety issues and security</i>			

## Case study

The school recognises the importance of maintaining their outdoor spaces in order to provide and support good quality learning opportunities for the children. They hold regular special events that encourage parental involvement in order to ensure the sustainability of their practice and provision outdoors.

Once a year they hold a 'ground force' week, where parents and the local community are invited to work on the maintenance and development of the outdoor area. In preparation for the week, practitioners consult with the children in order to gather views and perspectives and inform any future plans. Questions focus on what the children like and dislike about their outdoor area as well as what they would like to be able to do when outdoors. This, along with information gathered from the staff, is then fed into medium-and long-term plans and helps to shape a 'to do' list for the volunteers.

Activities such as painting, putting together new equipment, washing and cleaning of resources, planting and digging are carried out over the course of the week, drawing on particular skills of the adults involved. From one of these events, a 'green fingered' grandfather offered to become a regular volunteer at the school. He went on to plan and develop an allotment with the children where they enjoy growing a variety of fruit and vegetables. The children harvest their crops and hold an annual farmer's market to sell their produce to parents and the local community, introducing them to small enterprise and money management. The children also use the food they have grown in their cooking and are developing an appreciation of new tastes while learning about healthy lifestyles.



## Language, literacy and communication

Children need to be able to communicate and use language, whatever its form, for learning and socialising. They learn best through activities and experiences that engage all the senses and the outdoor environment can provide more freedom and space to engage in creative, multi-sensory activities such as role play, rhymes and songs, reading and writing that support language and literacy development. The dynamic environment adds special qualities to children's learning and play, such as the freedom to be more active and noisy, or space for quiet and calm, an open, roofless space and daily changes that offer fresh opportunities to stimulate and develop literacy skills.

### Resources

In order to make the most of enhanced opportunities for developing communication and literacy skills outside, consider putting together a resource kit. Resources such as clipboards, paper, letter cards, tactile letters, and mark making/writing implements such as pencils, chalks, paintbrushes and rollers (for use with water) are a good basis and can be used across the Areas of Learning. Puppets and initial sound resources are also a useful addition and a book box is vital to provision outdoors.



“It is important that the different elements of language and literacy are seen as linking and having a purpose. Language, reading and writing skills develop together and are interconnected. They should not be taught in isolation of each other. These literacy skills are developed through real life and meaningful experiences for the children.”

Language, Literacy and Communication Skills (Welsh Government, 2008)

### Stories

A child's skills as a speaker are strongly supported through story telling. By the age of three children may have become interested in increasingly complex imaginative play, through which they explore and make sense of their world in narrative form, using language to recreate roles and experiences. These important oral skills provide a basis for the child as a writer. The outdoors lends itself very well to an exciting range of imaginative and role-play themes that can stimulate dialogue, activity and thinking. Be creative in your provision and find ways to link the indoor and outdoor environments, e.g. items bought in the indoor role-play shop can be used outdoors for a picnic. Look for opportunities to create small world scenarios; leave long grass patches for playing with dinosaurs or animals, or small wooded patches that can become a fantasy or fairy tale world.

## Writing

Think about how spaces and activities outdoors can form a stimulus for writing. By using the outdoors as a starting point children can be encouraged to let their imaginations run free and encourage their use of descriptive language that will in turn support language, literacy and communication activities across the Areas of Learning.

Children's descriptions are most vivid when they include details from every sense, but they often only include what they can see. Make them aware of each of their senses through a number of short activities.

- Sitting in one spot ask children to draw or write down what they can see/hear/smell/taste/feel in as much detail as possible without saying where they are. At the end of the activity swap round the descriptions and ask the others to find where they were sitting.
- Encourage children to observe and describe everything above their heads – cloud formations, birds in flight, roof tiles, etc. – and then ask them to describe everything at ground level – insects, cracks in the tarmac, etc.
- Make sound maps – ask children to draw all the sounds they can hear on a piece of paper, using their own notations, to tune in to the sounds around them.



To encourage imaginative writing give the children a starting point, e.g. 'Last night in the playground . . . ' and add extra details as necessary such as 'I heard someone calling' or 'I saw a flash of light'. Encourage specific details by asking questions such as 'What were they doing there?', 'How did they get in?', 'How did they feel?' and 'Were they seen by anyone?'.

Support writing outdoors by providing quiet spaces away from noisier learning zones and resources such as clipboards, pencils (ink can smudge in damp conditions) and waterproof seating (cutting tarpaulin or oilcloth offers a cost effective solution and means each child can have their own space).

## Fun with mathematics

Developing mathematical thinking and learning mathematical skills can and should be part of children's everyday outdoor learning experiences. They can count, measure and explore shapes, and develop their understanding of mathematical concepts and numerical reasoning in context. In fact, all the mathematical learning children do indoors they can also do outdoors, but with vigour, freedom, and scale.

### Taking mathematics outdoors

Enhance the mathematical provision of your outdoor area by providing rich and exciting environments to engage children's curiosity and challenge thinking skills. A mathematics kit as part of continuous provision will help to make the most of planned and spontaneous learning opportunities.

Number cards, chalks, tape measures, large dice, hoops and containers, natural counters such as pine cones, shells or pebbles, and a washing line and pegs will always be useful and support mathematics across the Areas of Learning.



“**To solve problems children and adults alike have to draw on their experiences of the world. The younger the child, the less experience they will have to draw on, which is why it is important to give them problems that allow them the freedom to investigate without any feeling of failure.**”

Mathematical Development (Welsh Government, 2008)

### Using the digging area

- Vary the contents in the digging patch; mud, sawdust, gravel, leaf mould and forest bark will develop children's ideas of capacity and weight.
- A digging scenario can easily turn into a problem-solving one when the hole has to be deep enough to bury three rocks in. Children can explore, for example, just how many stones can fit into a newly dug hole.
- To encourage coin recognition and addition bury coins in the digging patch. Children will soon be competing to see who has dug up the most and this is all the more enjoyable if they don't know that the coins are there.

### Using natural materials

- When outdoors, use natural, tactile objects as counters, e.g. acorns, conkers, pebbles and shells, to make mathematics more interesting.
- Use sticks and string to encourage children to practice number formation on a larger scale. Mark out the numbers with sticks and connect them using the string.

- Encourage children to search for natural objects in the outdoors. Provide hoops and containers for the children to sort their finds into particular categories, and support them to count and record their finds.

“**Mathematics is relevant to a wide range of work undertaken by pupils aged 3 to 7. The ability to be proficient in mathematics and apply skills, knowledge and understanding in other curriculum areas and contexts are vital to educational achievement.**”

Play and active learning: A toolkit for Foundation Phase practitioners (Estyn, 2009)

## Mud kitchens

A mud kitchen combines elements of the home corner and cooking from indoor provision, which are then enriched through the special nature of being outside and working with nature’s most fundamental elements; earth and water. Mud kitchens are perfect for exploring, estimating volume and quantities, measuring weight, investigating time, creating patterns, mixing materials, buying and selling, working together and supporting imaginative learning. Adding a chalk board and chinks will encourage children to create their own menus and recipes and provide them with the opportunities to write for a purpose as well as using money within context.

## The potential of a metre square

A metre square, measured and pegged out with string or sticks, has huge potential as a basis for many activities across the Areas of Learning. They provide children, either individually or in small groups, with their own ‘canvases’ within which to work. Measuring out the square first can form a challenge for the children and provides the opportunity to learn about standard and non-standard measures.



Think about how a metre square can support children’s learning across the Areas of Learning, e.g. creating a small world that will help to develop a story or reflect a particular environment, planning and creating 3D maps and understanding simple co-ordinates, exploring symmetry, pattern and shape as well as number and place value if the square was gridded out. These ideas are just a suggestion and you will find many ways to incorporate this approach with your topic or theme. Building up a file of all the ideas practitioners and children come up with will support and share good practice outdoors.

## Natural materials

Playing with natural materials can be a therapeutic process which can support mental health needs. Children will spend long periods of time lost in their own world as they explore the feel and behaviour of the materials or play out imaginary scenes and stories to themselves. These resources offer stimuli for playing together in a wide range of ways. Children easily become scientists, engineers and inventors, artists, storytellers and language-users with natural resources, as they follow their innate urge to explore and make sense of their world.



### Resources

Sand, water and other natural materials are brought indoors as representatives of the natural world because we know they can offer children a broad range of experiences. However, indoor space and mess limitations usually mean that children are contained in their use of these materials. Taking advantage of the special nature and freedom of the outdoors supports exploration and experimentation with natural materials, often on a larger scale.

While some settings/schools have grounds that naturally provide these types of resources, there are many that need to supply these themselves as part of continuous provision outdoors. Shells, pebbles, pine cones, wood off-cuts and unusual leaves will offer a variety of open-ended play and learning opportunities. Consider the use of planters, tyres and baskets for storage and plan planting to provide year round interest and stimuli.

**“Initially, experiences with natural materials are tactile. Children should have opportunities to feel, investigate and explore the properties of these materials before undertaking more structured activities.”**

Play/Active Learning – Overview for 3 to 7-year-olds (Welsh Government, 2008)

### Small world play

Natural materials and small world play for children can go hand in hand as symbolic play is a key feature in early learning. Provide a wide range of natural resources to support creating small world environments, characters and narratives. A play tray<sup>6</sup> or blanket will form a good base for small world play, but why not bring some maths in to the activity and ask more able children to measure out a metre square in which to create their scenario.

<sup>6</sup> A large builders tray available at DIY stores or from setting/school suppliers.

## Natural artists

Natural materials found outdoors that readily lend themselves to artistic creations include willow withies (these are flexible, and can be used to construct large and small shapes), seed heads, pebbles and composted bark, leaves and clay (the soil in your grounds may contain enough clay to shape and mould). Experiment with earth, soil and stones to create artistic pieces. Use earth and berries to make pigments for painting. Even the sand in your sand area can be used for drawing, sculpting or embellishing.

## Sand

Sand is an incredibly versatile material and a particularly important element of continuous outdoor provision for children. Creating the largest possible sand pit in your outdoor space will not only provide a contrast to your indoor provision but will create endless opportunities for experimenting, digging and burying, transporting, investigating capacity, as well as creative and small world play.



### Keep safe

While exploring natural materials it is important that children also realise the importance of hand washing after being outdoors and handling natural resources and soil. It is also vital that children understand that when exploring natural spaces if they don't know what something is, e.g. a plant, fruit or seed, then they should not touch it. Practitioners need to be aware of the planting within their outdoor spaces or those that they are visiting and the potential implications for the children in setting/school.

The organisations listed on pages 43 and 44 will be able to support you in identifying potential natural hazards and local authority advisors may also be able to help.

## Den building/nooks and crannies

### Den building

Den building offers an excellent starting point for a wide range of different activities outdoors. A den building kit, or two, should form part of your continuous provision outdoors and the contents can reflect the developmental stages of the children at your setting/school. Materials and resources can be added to enhance learning and varying the equipment and resources will help to develop children's skills across the Areas of Learning.

### Resources

Building dens and creating nooks, crannies and hideaways offer first-hand experiences for children. With a good range of suitable resources and the appropriate support of an interested adult, children can construct a wide variety of small spaces on any surface. This construction process can have a wide range of learning outcomes, especially when children are engaged in sustained, shared, purposeful talk and adults engage in sustained, shared thinking with them.

Create potential for building dens by opening up an entrance to a cluster of bushes or clearing a neglected area. Provide loose materials such as boxes, crates, tarpaulins, blankets and 'joining tools' (e.g. tape, string and pegs). If natural space is at a minimum then structure supports can be created by setting broom handles into planters filled with cement and adding safe hooks. A supply of bamboo canes can encourage the development of thinking skills as the children work out for themselves the best way to create stable, strong frames and structures. Consider setting up a den building equipment 'shop' for the children to buy resources and develop their understanding of money.

### Time to build

One of the most vital ingredients for complex and satisfying den building is time. Children are unlikely to put effort into building any kind of space if they know that they will not have sufficient time to occupy it or develop play in and around it, turning it into their 'place'. Therefore, if you are not able to provide free flowing indoor-outdoor access, at least try to give children long periods outside each day/session and the possibility of returning to the play during the day/session and, where possible, over the next few days. Children love to decorate and embellish the spaces they create: make sure suitable and exciting materials are available outside for this, or let them know they can go indoors to get what they need.

It is important to remember that when children have opportunities to engage closely with their physical environment and to turn spaces into places that have meaning to them they develop a sense of belonging.



### Den building challenges

- Can you build a den to protect you from the rain? What kinds of materials will you need?
- How can you protect yourself from the sun? Will you have to move your den through the day?
- Can you work together to build a street of dens? Add numbers and signs and have fun decorating your house or shop.
- Can you build a den that is two metres tall? What is the best way to measure it? How can you build it safely?

“**Play is an essential ingredient in the curriculum which should be fun and stimulating. Well-planned play helps children to think and make sense of the world around them. It develops and extends their linguistic and communication skills, enables them to be creative, to investigate and explore different materials, and provides them with opportunities to experiment and predict outcomes.**”

Play/Active Learning – Overview for 3 to 7-year-olds (Welsh Government, 2008)

### Nooks and crannies

Do you find that your children want to go into small spaces, such as behind the storage shed, that you'd rather they didn't? Do you remember enjoying den building as a child? When children play it becomes apparent that small spaces, away from adult gaze, are important to them.

### What do nooks and crannies offer children?

Children seem to have a psychological need for child-sized spaces and nooks and crannies which afford privacy, independence and social intimacy outdoors and can give rise to a very different kind of play than is normally available in a large space designed for more active play. While the outdoors can meet children's desire for movement and boisterous play, they also need quiet and calm. It is therefore important to ensure that quieter, softer spaces are created within the outdoor environment, giving messages through layout, resources and guidance about the kind of play that is appropriate.

It is important to make these spaces available outdoors and support children's use of them. When children have opportunities to engage closely with their physical environment, and to turn spaces into places that have meaning for them, there is a positive impact on their well-being and developing sense of self.

Feeling that they are out of sight, of adults and other children, can give a precious perceived sense of privacy and independence to children, while affording them the opportunity to look into the world at large. It is often possible to give children this sense of being hidden while maintaining the ability to keep an eye on things for safety purposes. Being sure that hidden spaces are made as safe as possible will help you step back and facilitate independent child-initiated play.

### **How can we develop nooks and crannies outdoors?**

There are two approaches to this. The first, and fastest, approach is to provide a range of loose materials and resources that will enable your children to create their own nooks and crannies through building den-type spaces. This will help you make the most of the outdoor space you currently have, as dens can be made on grass, sand or open tarmac. Hooks and fixings can be added to walls or fences in order to provide anchor points for ropes while retaining flexibility of space.

The second, longer term approach is to evaluate your outdoor area and look to develop potential spaces to create natural nooks and crannies. Planting, screens, fencing, play houses and larger pieces of play equipment can all be added to provide children with the opportunities to create child-sized spaces. If the outdoors lacks spots to plant shrubs think about adding large, wheeled pots, which have the added advantage of being moveable to create 'learning zones'<sup>7</sup>.



Providing a wide range of loose materials, will encourage girls to engage in more construction-based activities and allow boys to develop their communication skills while supporting their play to develop without too much disruption to those around them.

**“ It is often possible to give children a sense of being hidden whilst maintaining the ability to keep an eye on things for safety purposes. ”**

Early Years Outdoors: Nooks and Crannies: secret spaces and places  
(Learning through Landscapes, 2005)

<sup>7</sup> Further guidance on creating learning zones can be found in *First steps outdoors* (2010).

## Art and creativity



Art offers children a vital opportunity to express their creativity and communicate ideas to others. It can build self-confidence and help develop a strong sense of individuality, as well as develop children's practical knowledge, help them learn how to use their judgement and imagination, and connect with others. Taking exploring art outdoors adds an extra and special dimension for children – offering height, resources and space to experiment with.

### Getting started

Art and the outdoors are natural partners. The outdoors offers children a unique space to experiment in and, by drawing on the environment itself, a wide range of exciting

stimuli. Appreciating what the outdoors has to offer will help you think big. An art kit is an important part of the Foundation Phase outdoors.

Provide paints, chinks, large rolls of paper, fabrics and mark-making equipment such as rollers, brushes, sponges, bath scrunchies and spray bottles. You will also want somewhere to dry and display the children's work such as a washing line and pegs, wall or fence. A camera will also provide a useful way of recording the children's creative processes as well as the finished results.

**“Children should explore a wide range of stimuli, develop their ability to communicate and express their creative ideas, feelings and views, and reflect on their work.”**

*Creative Development (Welsh Government, 2008)*

### Get messy and work on a large scale

Think about using materials and techniques that wouldn't be suitable indoors. Mud, for example, can be used to draw with and mould. With more space you can create giant junk art sculptures or why not use gathered natural materials to create a piece that can be left outdoors to enhance your space. Watered down paints in spray bottles are easy and fun to use – try creating huge pictures on sheets draped over fences. Sheets decorated in this way can be used for den building.

## Working together

Big art projects that encourage and involve groups or even the whole setting/school naturally require collaboration, and help to develop children's negotiation and participation skills as well as inspire confidence and a sense of belonging. Projects that everyone can work on together and that enhance your outdoors – such as murals and/or mosaic-tile paths – will also add long-lasting displays to your space.

## Looking for inspiration

Before starting a piece of artwork inspire the children with works from established artists.

**Sculptures** – look at work from Robert Thomas, Barbara Hepworth, Andy Goldsworthy and Henry Moore. Encourage the children to think about form, texture, colours and materials.

**Colour** – the works of Kandinsky and Rothko are good starting points and looking at the work of Welsh artists such as Stan Rosenthal and Martyn Evans will support Curriculum Cymreig. Try taking children outdoors on rainy days to explore colour mixing.

**Abstract** – Pollock's paintings are a good starting point for large scale artworks everyone can enjoy creating. Encourage the children to experiment with a range of tools and observe the results.



## Music and movement



Music and the outdoor environment are a powerful combination. Understanding the value of music – both indoors and outdoors – is part of the work of every practitioner.

Music is key to helping children develop all their senses. Children sing songs and rhymes spontaneously during play and practitioners who respond to these natural learning opportunities can further their understanding and enjoyment of music. Children explore and appreciate sounds, music, rhythm and pattern happily, developing their skills with adult support. Outdoors is a great place for singing, responding to and composing music as well as exploring volume and being active in creative ways. Music outdoors also adds enjoyment to all weather conditions.

Use manufactured instruments when an adult can engage with the children at some level. You may want to create a music resource box with laminated pictures of the instruments and store it in a dry, frost-free place. Include the following:

- tambourine
- claves (or a woodblock of some kind)
- maracas
- guiro
- jingle and Indian bells
- triangle
- Djembe drums
- a variety of whistles

and pitched instruments such as:

- xylophone
- glockenspiel
- set of chime bars.

**“Children should explore a wide range of stimuli, develop their ability to communicate and express their creative ideas, feelings and views, and reflect on their work.”**

Knowledge and Understanding of the World (Welsh Government, 2008)

## Junk music

Explore the sounds that can be made outdoors using only what can be found in the grounds or by reconstructing junk materials. Make instruments that reference real musical instruments. Notice how and where the materials used affect the sounds and pitch. Have fun performing and/or recording a musical piece. Here are some suggestions for making 'junk' music.

- **Drums** – large planters (covered in thick tape), water butts, bins, drain covers, pots and pans, footsteps (running, stomping, walking), balls bouncing.
- **Xylophone** – fences (run a stick along the panels), plant pots of different sizes, goal posts, bottles filled with different amounts of liquid.
- **Shakers** – plant pots/cans/bottles filled with pebbles/bark, chippings/sand.
- **Chimes** – bamboo canes, piping or old cutlery – make holes in the canes or pipes and find a suitable place from which to suspend them.
- **Rain sticks** – old drain pipes – fill with different-sized objects until you create the effect that sounds most like rain.



Don't forget that nature can provide its own instruments. Encourage children to compose pieces using the sounds they hear around them, recorded using ICT equipment.

## Sound trails

Sound trails will not only support children's creative development but are also a great way of encouraging children to move around and explore the whole of the outdoor space. Make a musical treasure trail of sounds using different instruments, songs or the sounds of nature. Weave the trail into a story, e.g. if you wanted to create a story about frogs, start by hiding a range of instruments including some that could make frog noises. Ask the children to find them, try them and decide which makes the best frog sound. Children can follow pictures or an adult's verbal clues.

**'Music is a more potent instrument than any other for education.'**

Plato

## Case study

The children and staff at the infant and nursery school were tired of their tarmac playground that lacked natural spaces for playing and learning. The school council led a consultation with the rest of the children, drawing up questionnaires, creating an 'ideas box' and holding assemblies to capture everyone's views. It was agreed that the school needed to develop a garden space with lots of interesting planting and importantly a grassed area.



The children asked one of their talented teaching assistants to help them collate and draw up plans of what the finished area might look like and staff developed their own ideas through attending some outdoor learning training days. Once work was completed the children had the opportunity to add their own touches planting their own fruit and vegetables that they enjoy including in school lunches and cooking clubs as well as selling to parents.

Building on their success the staff were keen to develop the grounds further in order to support learning across the curriculum. Again the school council consulted with the children and talked to a playground designer. However, after deciding that the plans were too prescriptive and would dominate the space staff and children worked together to draw up plans that would suit what they wanted to be able to do outside.

Parents donated resources for kit boxes that now form flexible continuous provision. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) also provided funds for sheds and, as a church school, a reflective space in the form of a gazebo.

The school is constantly looking at ways to take learning and play outside and is progressively developing small outdoor areas to facilitate different aspects of the Areas of Learning.

"Outdoor learning is an integral part of our curriculum, and interweaves throughout the plans. We ensure that regular opportunities are given for children to explore the world around them, and encompass the outdoors into all the Areas of Learning. The Foundation Phase skills for the Areas of Learning, religious education and the LNF are displayed on the wall in our outdoor area."

Outdoor practice and provision hasn't been developed overnight; it is a continuous process with the staff, children, governors, parents and community working tirelessly to develop a safe, fun and functioning outdoor area, providing the children with an opportunity to learn from an inclusive, aspiring and challenging Areas of Learning and where outdoor learning is celebrated and valued.

## Continuous provision resources

### Den building



✓	Items
	Tarpaulin.
	Carpet tiles/off-cuts (cardboard inner tubes are excellent too).
	Blankets – plastic-backed picnic blankets are useful.
	Large sheets and curtains.
	Shower curtains.
	Sheer fabrics.
	Pegs and basket.
	Gingham material.
	Camouflage material.
	Baskets (with handles), bags.
	Suitcase and/or backpacks.
	Bamboo canes (3+ft long).
	Masking tape, duct tape (tearable tapes).
	Variety of ropes.
	Wooden trouser clip hanger (hang from branch/fence with fabric secured).
	String, scissors.
	Torches.
	Umbrellas.
	Pulleys.
	Cargo netting.
	Ground pegs.

# Natural materials



✓	Items
	Log slices.
	Wood off-cuts of various shapes and sizes.
	Branch pieces and driftwood.
	Bamboo sticks or lawn edging.
	Small bag of wood off-cuts or wooden bricks.
	A variety of baskets and/or wooden bowls.
	Shells and seaweed.
	Pebbles, slate pieces, gravel.
	Pine cones.
	Polished pebbles.
	Smooth glass nuggets.
	Wicker shapes – stars, rings, etc.
	Natural fabrics such as hessian, raw silk, cotton and muslin.
	Unusual leaves.
	Bark chippings.
	Seeds and tree fruit such as conkers, acorns and dried seed pods.
	Air drying clay.
	Charcoal.
	Raffia.
	Handmade papers.

# Art



✓	Items
	Large sheets and rolls of paper.
	Plastic trays (repurposed food trays).
	Sheets/large pieces of plain cotton fabric.
	Ready mixed paint – red, yellow, blue, black and white.
	Block paints.
	Food colouring.
	Children’s paintbrushes.
	Sponges, bath scrunchies.
	Decorator’s brushes, rollers and trays.
	Chalks – playground size.
	Paint colour charts.
	Double-sided sticky tape.
	Chunky felt tip pens.
	Straws.
	Water spray bottle/washing up liquid bottles.
	Air drying clay.
	Old spoons and buckets for mud art.
	String, wool, pipe cleaners, feathers.
	Child-sized carrying/tool box.
	PVA glue and spreaders.
	Crepe and tissue papers.
	Pegs and washing line.

## Exploring water



✓	Items
	Hose on reel with spray attachments.
	Variety of lengths of hose (varying widths too).
	Guttering and pipes cut to various lengths.
	Guttering attachments such as hoppers and 'Y' shaped fittings.
	Umbrellas (range of sizes).
	Funnels, jugs, cups and buckets.
	Measuring spoons and ladles.
	Tongs and large tweezers.
	Sieves and colanders.
	Spray bottles (repurposed from household products, thoroughly cleaned out).
	Repurposed plastic bottles (shampoo, washing up liquid, etc.).
	1l, 2l and 4l milk bottles with lids.
	Large water cooler bottle.
	Decorator's brushes of varying sizes.
	Decorator's rollers and trays.
	Scrubbing and nail brushes.
	Joining tools such as duct tape, string, cable ties, strong elastic bands.
	Sequins, food colouring.
	Pipettes and droppers.
	Ice cube trays.
	Cake icing tubes (the type with plunger).
	Sponges, bath scrunchies, loofahs.
	Watering cans.
	Tarpaulin (to protect grass from getting too muddy if necessary).

## Music and movement



✓	Items
	Strips and pieces of various fabrics (floaty, shiny, etc.).
	Lightweight scarves in a variety of patterns and colours.
	Ribbons in a variety of colours, lengths and widths.
	Small, soft hair bands (to tie scarves and ribbons to and put on wrists).
	Feathers (differing sizes, colours, etc.).
	Bubbles.
	Wrist bells, maracas, castanets.
	Hand-held drum and beater.
	Old CDs (to hand hold for reflection).
	Tactile balls.
	Crepe paper (to cut into long flowing strips).
	Small parachute/sheet.
	2m <sup>2</sup> stretchy fabric.
	Beanbags.
	Balloons.
	Hoops, quoits.
	Cheerleader pompoms.
	Stepping stones/upturned washing up bowls as alternative.
	Egg and spoon (wooden spoons and small balls).
	Pocket kites.
	Skipping ropes.
	Music CDs/MP3 provide a range including Welsh folk music, classical pieces and multicultural music.

## Literacy



✓	Items
	Clipboards.
	Pencils, crayons, chinks.
	Whiteboards and markers.
	Initial sound flashcards.
	Tactile letters.
	Paint brushes and small pots (to use with water or runny mud).
	Laminated and/or large letter shapes.
	Laminated leaf shapes (use for word and sentence formation activities).
	Laminated leaves with names of children at setting/school.
	Puppets.
	Echo microphone.
	Small collection of unusual objects (prompts for story telling and circle times).
	Tumble dryer duct tube.
	Cups/cans and string.
	Pegs and washing line.
	Flash cards showing high frequency words.
	Assortment of papers.
	Initial-sound objects.

Don't forget to include a book box as part of your continuous provision resources. Choose fiction books that reflect your topics as well as stories set in the outdoors. Non-fiction books should support the children's lines of enquiry, and don't forget to add some reference books so that adults at the setting/school are able to answer some of the inevitable questions that the children will ask about their discoveries outdoors.

## Meaningful maths



✓	Items
	Laminated and/or tactile numbers – variety of sizes, colours and textures.
	Laminated mathematical symbols.
	Laminated number leaves (easily made from card).
	Beanbags.
	Hoops.
	Tape measures/rulers.
	Blank laminated leaves (to support number sentence activities).
	Natural counters (conkers, acorns, pine cones, pebbles).
	Solar-powered calculators.
	Chalks, pencils, crayons.
	Skittles/cones.
	Tactile numbers.
	Plastic and real coins.
	Shape-finding frames.
	Clipboards.
	Dice.
	Numicon.
	Washing line and pegs.
	Balls of string.
	Hand-held plastic mirrors (to investigate symmetry).
	Stopwatches.
	Small set of balance scales and weights.

## Nature detectives



✓	Items
	Magnifying glasses.
	Bug viewers.
	White plastic cups/pots.
	Shallow white plastic trays.
	Binoculars.
	Microscope.
	Tweezers.
	Whiteboards/markers.
	Hand-held plastic mirrors.
	Mini-beast identification cards.
	Magnets and small magnetic items.
	Shrimping nets and larger bug nets.
	Child-friendly thermometers.
	Rulers/tape measures.
	Aerial image or map of outdoor space.
	Trowels/small forks.
	Buckets/old tubs.
	Plant labels/lolly sticks.
	Bird/leaf/flower/plant identification cards/books.

## Further reading, useful contacts and links

### Further reading

*Outdoor Learning: an evaluation of learning in the outdoors for children under five in the Foundation Phase* (Estyn, 2011)

[www.estyn.gov.uk/english/docViewer/221594.1/outdoor-learning-an-evaluation-of-learning-in-the-outdoors-for-children-under-five-in-the-foundation-phase-september-2011/?navmap=30,163](http://www.estyn.gov.uk/english/docViewer/221594.1/outdoor-learning-an-evaluation-of-learning-in-the-outdoors-for-children-under-five-in-the-foundation-phase-september-2011/?navmap=30,163)

*First Steps Outdoors* (Welsh Government and Learning through Landscapes, 2010)

[www.ltl.org.uk/wales/FirstStepsOutdoors.php](http://www.ltl.org.uk/wales/FirstStepsOutdoors.php)

*Every Child Outdoors* (The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, 2010)

[www.rspb.org.uk/Images/everychildoutdoors\\_tcm9-259689.pdf](http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/everychildoutdoors_tcm9-259689.pdf)

*Childhood and Nature: Design principles for educators* by David Sobel  
(Stenhouse Publishers, 2008)

*Evaluating the Foundation Phase: Key findings on the environment (indoor/outdoor)* (2014)

[www.wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/evaluation-foundation-phase/?skip=1&lang=en](http://www.wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/evaluation-foundation-phase/?skip=1&lang=en)

### Useful contacts and links

#### Council for Learning Outside the Classroom

A charity existing to champion learning outside the classroom and encourage young people to get out and about.

[www.lotc.org.uk](http://www.lotc.org.uk)

#### Growing Schools

Growing schools has a website which has been designed to support teachers and practitioners in using the 'outdoor classroom' as a resource across the curriculum for learners of all ages.

[www.growingschools.org.uk](http://www.growingschools.org.uk)

#### Learning through Landscapes

Learning through Landscapes is the UK charity dedicated to enhancing outdoor learning and play for children. They provide advice and support to early years settings/schools with a comprehensive website.

[www.ltl.org.uk](http://www.ltl.org.uk)

#### Natural Resources Wales

Natural Resources Wales work throughout Wales, working directly with groups to offer curriculum-linked visits in local woodlands. They offer training sessions to help practitioners, group leaders and others use their local woodlands for learning as well as facilitating Forest School sessions within their own grounds.

[www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-8KER42](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-8KER42)

## **Play Wales**

Play Wales works to raise awareness of children and young people's need and right to play and to promote good practice at every level of decision making and in every place where children might play. For specific advice for settings/schools including guidance on the use of setting/school grounds for play outside of teaching hours visit their website.

[www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schools](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schools)

## **Royal Horticultural Society**

The Royal Horticultural Society helps settings/schools to develop gardens and growing spaces. A range of resources are available on their website.

[www.rhs.org.uk](http://www.rhs.org.uk)

## **Woodland Trust**

The Woodland Trust is a charity dedicated to woodland conservation. They help by planting trees, protecting woods and inspiring people to enjoy the nature on their doorstep.

There are lots of activity suggestions and resources for young children on the Nature Detectives website.

[www.naturedetectives.org.uk](http://www.naturedetectives.org.uk)

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Learning through Landscapes for providing images and resources which support the guidance given within this document.

[www.ltl.org.uk](http://www.ltl.org.uk)

We would also like to express our thanks to:

Cymer Afan Primary School

Melin Infants School

Mount Stuart Primary School

Neath Abbey Infant School

School Lane Playgroup

Ysgol Babanod Llanfairfechan

the EAS advisory team.