

### School Grounds

Most schools and early years settings have a multi-faceted resource for learning and playing outside the classroom on their doorstep – their own site or grounds.

The immediate surroundings of a school or early years setting are an easily-accessible, cost-effective and convenient resource for learning and playing outside the classroom.

The range of possible activities may be limited by the size and nature of the site; even so most school grounds can offer some or all of the following possibilities:

- play areas – for problem-solving/team-building games and activities
- habitats such as playing fields, hedges, meadows and ponds – for field study and science
- school garden or growing areas – for science, sustainability and food education
- whole site – for orienteering, outdoor literacy (e.g. storytelling) and practical numeracy activities, visual and performing arts (e.g. murals, sculptures, mosaics, music and drama)
- paved areas – for D&T outdoor experiments
- wooded areas – for Forest School activities
- playing fields – overnight camping experiences
- playground equipment and climbing/traversing walls – for adventurous activities.



#### ***5 ways to make the most of school grounds for engaging the community:***

1. Look at what messages are being given out about your school by its external appearance - does it care for its pupils? Is it proud of them? Find out if your school grounds are telling people the right things about your school.
2. Plan a school grounds development project, working with individuals and groups from the local community to make the most of their expertise. You could invite your local allotments society to help you set up an allotment on site.
3. Look at whether your school grounds could be made available to the local community outside school hours. Talk to providers of local community activities to investigate possible links.
4. Hold a garden party or picnic in your grounds for a local community group. Children could design invitations and posters, and decorate the grounds.
5. Many religious and cultural festivals celebrate the natural world or hold events that take place outdoors. Host an event in your school grounds and invite your local community.

### ***5 ways to make the most of your grounds for improving physical health:***

1. Set up a play equipment loan system, providing skipping ropes, hoops and balls. One method used by many schools is to issue children with a named key ring in exchange for a deposit. When they want to borrow a piece of equipment, they hand in the key ring which is hung on a peg board to show what they have borrowed.
2. Start a food garden, and build it into the curriculum. Host a school grounds feast at harvest time, or grow herbs that can be incorporated in school dinners.
3. Provide adults with appropriate training and skills to help them support children's positive play
4. Provide features which challenge children, to help them develop physically, and also which help them develop their judgement about managing risk and staying safe. Share understanding about the importance of risk and challenge with staff and parents.
5. Plant trees and shrubs for shade in summer: tarmac playgrounds can get very hot but transpiration from nearby trees can reduce the temperature on hot days by as much as 2 degrees.

### ***5 ways to make the most of your grounds for developing social confidence:***

1. Allow children the space, time and freedom to explore and discover for themselves.
2. Ensure that the school grounds are a place where all children feel they are valued, with equal opportunities for both girls and boys regarding the use of play areas, and inclusion of children with special needs. Provide a varied landscape including play equipment and seating in different locations, and designed to suit different sizes of groups. Investigate the possibility of multi-purpose features which can be both seating or play equipment - this can be as simple as large logs, or designed bespoke by a specialist designer.
3. Work with older pupils to help them look out for children who are in need of a friend. Some schools have "buddy" systems with designated pupils looking out for younger children; others create special spaces where children know they can go to find someone to talk to or play with. "Buddies" can help new children to familiarise themselves with the school grounds, as children unused to a natural environment, or faced with unfamiliar play equipment, can sometimes feel threatened.
4. Include experiences in the school grounds as part of circle time discussion, or make the school grounds an item for school council discussion. Involve children in developing solutions for any playground conflicts or issues.
5. Set up a group to plan improvements to the grounds - this could be an eco-committee, or part of the school council. Allocate a budget for which they are responsible, and help them consult with the wider school population.

For further information and to investigate the specialist support available, such as training to build confidence in working with young people in the outdoors; advice on how to improve grounds; or grants to help make changes, visit [www.loveschoolgrounds.org.uk](http://www.loveschoolgrounds.org.uk).

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