



# The good school playground guide

Developing school playgrounds to support the curriculum and nurture happy, healthy children



Learning through Landscapes



Investing in children's play is one of the most important things we can do to improve children's health and wellbeing in Scotland. Although children are playing outdoors less now than at any point in our history, most still have access to a school playground where they can play outdoors on a regular basis.

With thoughtful design, these spaces can play a significant role in improving children's health and wellbeing. They can stimulate physical activity and encourage the development of important physical competencies. They can provide positive childhood experiences of being outdoors that we know increase the likelihood of being active outdoors in adult life. And they can create an environment that meets children's developmental needs to explore, create, collaborate, socialise and simply to 'be' – all which we know are important for their emotional health.

The last few years have seen some significant improvements in our school playgrounds as we have begun to understand these factors more. But we can do better. That's why both the 'Good Places Better Health' report and NICE guidelines\* highlight the need for continued improvement in the design of school playgrounds.

Our vision is that every child in Scotland has a school playground that purposefully supports their health and wellbeing. I would commend this guide to all those involved in working with children and young people and encourage teachers, parents, landscape architects and school facilities managers to work together to make this vision a reality.

**Harry Burns**  
Chief Medical Officer for Scotland

\* You can link to the **Good Places Better Health** report and the **NICE** guidelines via the Pdf version of this document.

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## Good playgrounds, better health

**'Regular access to quality natural spaces can help address some of the most pressing challenges facing children today'**

### Taking it further

The guide has been written to be relevant for early years, primary and secondary schools. Not all ideas will work equally well in all contexts, but many can be adapted to suit the relevant age group. The guide is intentionally short and focused with each section suggesting further useful reading or resources. These are hyperlinked and you can assess them by clicking on the **bold text** in the pdf version of this guide. For those reading hard copy, the best way of exploring the online links is to start from the online version at [www.ttl.org.uk/playgroundguide](http://www.ttl.org.uk/playgroundguide).

Childhood has changed dramatically in recent decades. One of the most significant changes has been the decline of children's playful and self-led exploration of the natural world. We're realising that this 'extinction of experience' has negative impacts on children's health and wellbeing. Putting this more positively, we're beginning to understand the ways in which regular access to quality natural spaces can help address some of the most pressing challenges facing children today.

Good outdoor environments encourage children to be physically active and to develop physical skills and confidence. They can foster the development of collaboration, social skills, creativity and positive behaviour. Regular access to nature provides a refuge from bustle and hassle, helping to alleviate stress and support positive emotional wellbeing. Playful interaction with nature encourages an understanding of and appreciation for the natural world. Teachers are discovering that the outdoors is often a better place to learn than indoors, bringing learning to life and opening up opportunities that are simply unavailable in the classroom. And when children are closely involved in developing and looking after their outdoor environment, it helps to develop their sense of belonging, participation, respect and pride. Together, these factors can contribute positively and significantly to children's physical and emotional health but they also encourage health promoting habits and attitudes that have a lasting impact into adulthood.



**‘Too many children are still growing up in dull and uninspiring outdoor environments and missing out on life-enhancing experiences’**

**Vital spaces**

Children can, and should, have these experiences in a range of outdoor spaces, but there are compelling strategic reasons that make school grounds particularly important.

**Universal** Not every child has access to a private garden, a nearby park or an area of woodland. Almost every child has access to school grounds.

**Regular** There’s something very significant about daily experience of a natural space, experiencing it in all weathers and throughout the seasons.

**Time** Most children and young people will spend around 1500 hours of their life in their school playground. For many, this will be more than in any other outdoor play setting. This unstructured outdoor time is more than double the time that they’ll spend in PE lessons.

**Accessible** School grounds are usually the most accessible outdoor area for teachers, eliminating travel costs and time.

**Ownership** Children can be actively involved in the management of their school grounds, helping to foster attitudes of stewardship and responsibility.

**Community** School grounds can be an important community asset; a space where parents meet and interact and a space that could be accessible for wider community use out of school time. Local communities are often very willing to lend practical support to help their school improve its grounds.

A growing number of schools have recognised the potential of their grounds and are now providing outdoor spaces and experiences that support children’s learning and wellbeing. However, too many children are still growing up in dull and uninspiring outdoor environments and missing out on these life-enhancing experiences.

The Scottish School Estate Strategy highlights a need for improved design and increased investment, with an ambition that designers make “the best use of school grounds and the outdoor spaces as an integral part of the learning environment ensuring that landscape design is at a par with building design.”

This guide has been written to help make that ambition a reality. It explores the links between school grounds and children’s health, wellbeing and learning and offers practical advice on how to develop school grounds in which children can thrive. It’s written for everyone who has an interest in how schools can provide the very best learning and health-promoting environment for children and young people; whether you’re an architect designing a new school, a teacher tasked with improving your existing outdoor space or a parent looking for ways to provide practical help to your child’s school. Some of the ideas in this guide might seem ambitious but many are simple, inexpensive and could be implemented almost immediately. There are also some suggestions in the Playground placemaking section for how you might make better use of your grounds as they currently are.

Whatever your budget or scale of ambition, our hope is that this guide will help you develop nurturing outdoor spaces and create memorable outdoor experiences that will help make Scotland the best place to grow up in.

**What’s in this guide...**

- **Designing for play**
- **Playground placemaking**
- **A word about risk**
- **Design for learning**
- **Nature**
- **Growing**
- **Making it happen**





## School improvement through play

### Encourage physical activity

Being inactive is detrimental to both physical and mental health and wellbeing, and the UK Physical Activity Guidelines recommend at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity for all 5 to 18 year olds. The type of outdoor space we provide for our children has a significant impact on how active they are during break times. For many children, school play time is the most active part of their day, so providing features that stimulate a range of physical activities is one of the most powerful ways of supporting them to be active. This is particularly important for children who are not naturally drawn to sport or to competitive rule-based games.

### Develop physical skills

Active play isn't just important for providing aerobic exercise. It's also crucial for developing physical literacy, which is the ability to use a range of basic movement skills in a competent manner and in a range of settings. It includes skills like climbing, jumping, balancing and being able to negotiate uneven terrain. It involves being able to assess what's going on around you and knowing how to safely move your body in response. Physical literacy isn't just about having the ability to do these things; it's also about developing an enjoyment of doing these things. It's a crucial foundation for developing competence across a wide range of sports and for becoming an active and healthy adult.

### Boost creative thinking

Child-led free play unleashes and stretches children's natural creativity. The non-prescriptive nature of features and materials that are introduced for free play requires children to exercise their imaginations, to look for possibilities, solve problems and to invent their own games, activities and scenarios. These are skills and competencies that are hugely important in many areas of life and in increasing demand from employers.

### Improve behaviour and social skills

Learning how to get on with people is a foundational life skill for professional and personal success. Our schools need to equip children with the skills to negotiate, compromise, lead, resolve conflict and collaborate. These are skills that are difficult to teach in the classroom but which can be developed effectively when we provide outdoor play environments that stimulate these kinds of 'pro-social' behaviours. Play also provides a valuable opportunity for children to interact with each other across ages, genders, abilities and ethnic backgrounds.

Schools that have developed more playful outdoor spaces report that behaviour improves as children spend more of their time collaborating and creating. This doesn't just make for more pleasant playtimes but leads to classes that settle more quickly in class after break time.

### Teacher-free learning

Learning doesn't just take place in the classroom or when adults are in control. Observers of free play can readily identify significant and deep learning across a range of domains. Some schools that have made significant changes to their playgrounds have given teachers time to observe play at break times in order to identify curriculum experiences and outcomes that are taking place without any active adult lead. Teachers are then able to build on these experiences in class time, both indoors and outdoors.

### Support positive emotional wellbeing

Children who are happy at play time are usually happy at school. For most children, play times are the highlight of their day, but for some, play time can be anxious and difficult. The impact of outdoor play on wellbeing is multi-faceted. Wellbeing is positively influenced by fresh air, physical movement and natural light. Children are happier and feel more included in a space that offers multiple possibilities for play. There's no stigma from not being involved in a large group activity and no need to simply mark time until the bell goes. Children's wellbeing is also supported by having access to quiet and calm, being able to enjoy the restorative power of nature and having the opportunity to direct their own activity and engage their brains in different patterns of thinking than are possible in a formal classroom setting.

# Designing for play

Play is hugely important in almost every area of children's lives. It improves social skills, brain development and creativity whilst supporting emotional resilience, physical development, confidence and learning. Our early years colleagues have long understood the importance of play but if we're honest many schools do little to create the kind of rich play environments and experiences that can unlock these benefits for children.

### Best play

Schools often use the word 'play' to describe an activity that is planned and controlled by adults; for example a game of rounders or a treasure hunt. However, the kind of play described in this guide is about what happens when you create a wide range of possibilities and then let children use their imaginations, exercise their creativity and control their own activity. Often described as "free play", this concept can initially seem strange or daunting in a school context where adults are used to leading and directing children's activities. However, schools that have taken this approach report that it enriches children's experiences and school life in many ways.

### Secondary schools

It's often assumed that secondary pupils no longer want to play. Observations and focus groups suggest this is not the case. For example, when researchers spoke with secondary pupils as part of an Audit Scotland Review, they concluded that "Not many secondary school pupils felt they had access to a real playground." Play in adolescence can be an important route to developing a sense of identity. It is often highly social and, for boys in particular, there is commonly a desire for play that includes elements of physical skill and challenge. The recent rise in the popularity of parkour in secondary schools is a good example.



**'Play will be to the 21st century what work was to the industrial age – our dominant way of knowing, doing and creating value'**

Pat Kane

**'I saw more mathematics of volume, weight and measure in the playground in 10 minutes than we could have done in class from textbooks'**

Head teacher





## Play design principles

Perhaps the most useful design concept for play is 'possibility'. All the suggestions that follow are really about introducing a rich range of possibilities that allow children to choose and direct play in a wide variety of forms. Another key theme is the use of features that are 'non-prescriptive'; which stimulate or require imagination and which can be used in multiple ways, often unforeseen by adults. Natural materials and landforms provide both these elements and so have a key role in play design. It can be helpful to think about two overlapping kinds of play feature; fixed elements, often related to landform, and loose materials that can be moved and manipulated.

### Topography

Varied topography stimulates varied play. Mounds, hollows, slopes and tunnels will naturally provoke running, rolling and jumping. They also help to break up large open spaces into more interesting child-friendly micro-spaces that can become a context for more imaginative and small-world play. A good playground should have places for the fairies to live – discuss!

### Trees, shrubs and long grass

Open woodland is one of nature's richest playgrounds and many schools can replicate this kind of space in even a small area of their grounds. Trees and shrubs help to create an atmosphere, provide peaceful seclusion, define spaces, create shade and add movement. They enrich spaces with their differing colours, smells and textures and their seasonal differences. In addition, they provide twigs, leaves and seeds that can provide a wonderful bank of natural materials for play.

Perhaps one of the simplest and cheapest ways of creating a more varied landscape for play is to create a varied mowing regime. Areas of longer grass mixed with pathways and glades of shorter grass will help to break up more monotonous stretches of grass and create a richer variety of spaces for play. This kind of habitat is better for insect life too – so children have more opportunity to interact playfully with nature.



### Logs and boulders

Perhaps the ultimate non-prescriptive play feature, fallen trees and boulders can be physical challenges, social spaces and opportunities to explore fossils and bugs. They can be incorporated into dens or transformed by the imaginative minds of children into space ships, war ships or castles. They can often be sourced cheaply from local contacts, such as a local woodland owner or quarry.



**'Create non prescriptive features which stimulate children's imagination and which can be used in multiple ways'**

### Large sand play

There's a long tradition of providing sand play for children in the early years but primary schools are now recognising the valuable experiences that sand can offer their children. For example, maths concepts are supported through experimenting with volume, mass, and flow. Engineering abilities are developed as children construct and excavate. Motor skills are enhanced by digging, constructing, carrying and jumping and creativity is supported as children construct imaginary worlds. A common feature of sand play is the way that it promotes cooperation as children work together on their play projects.

The best sand pits are large and custom-built on site but temporary sand pits are easy to create using tarpaulins filled with sand and surrounded by sleepers or tyres. The same kind of temporary structures can also be used for water play. Some schools have made a start by simply designating a dry area of ground that children can use to dig and play.



## Loose materials

Children seem to have an innate desire to manipulate their physical environment and loose materials offer a huge range of opportunities for non-prescriptive play. Although there are costs involved in procuring, storing and managing loose materials, these can often be fairly minimal and so loose materials are a great way to begin enriching play provision in schools if budgets are limited.

Some loose materials can be naturally generated by the landscape: mud, pebbles, seeds, grass, twigs, leaves, pruned branches and daisies. Other natural materials can be brought in, like shells, cones, hazel rods or wooden discs. In addition to natural materials, some man-made items offer rich opportunities for play, for example tarpaulins, pipes, rope, plastic crates, small toy figures and vehicles, chalk, planks and joinery offcuts.

These materials stimulate a wide range of play activities including den building, construction and the creation of fantasy or small world play scenarios. They are particularly effective in stimulating children's creativity and encouraging team work and collaboration. To be effective, loose materials need to be carefully introduced and well managed. Children will also need ready access to loose materials, which means providing robust and accessible outdoor storage facilities.



**'Playtimes are more peaceful now. Staff enjoy supervising the children even more...'**

Playground supervisor



## Playground supervision

The kind of play environment described here is different to the current norm in many schools and calls for a different approach to playground supervision. Instead of policing play, the role of the supervisor changes to:

- providing an environment that has lots of play possibility
- deciding what materials/spaces will be available for a particular play session
- creating an environment where children feel empowered to take control and direct play
- involving children in the development of a minimum set of basic rules of conduct, especially relating to safety and mutual respect
- standing back and allowing children to lead their play and resisting the temptation to suggest activities or mediate in disputes
- observing closely to gain an understanding of what is happening – not just what children are physically doing but what is going on in their minds and relationships as they do it – and what the impact of this is on children
- using this understanding to inform future decisions about resources, materials and boundaries etc.
- ensuring that children take responsibility for managing materials – including tidying up and storage
- only intervening when absolutely necessary for children's welfare.

**'Children are now dealing with their own problems instead of asking adults to get involved'**

Playground supervisor

Although playground supervisors often express understandable concerns at the start of this process, with appropriate management support and time to plan properly, most are able to develop their own common sense approaches to managing this kind of play. Crucially, most supervisors quickly appreciate the benefits to children when they see them playing in these ways and most report that play times become calmer and more enjoyable.

**Taking it further** Visit the online version for access to:

- **Ten short films** with discussion notes for playground supervisors on managing and supervising free play in schools.
- **Case studies** and **film** highlighting some of the best current practice in Scottish schools.
- Inspiration from amazing **Berlin school playgrounds**.
- A comprehensive **guide to using loose materials** to support play in primary schools from North Lanarkshire Council.
- Short film demonstrating how **loose materials** are enriching play in one primary school.
- A short film showing how an improved play space is being used for **language development**.
- Advice on **designing play spaces** from Play England.
- A **'taxonomy of play types'** to provide a helpful structure for thinking about the wide variety of ways in which children play.
- A helpful summary of research evidence on the **importance of play** for children from Play Scotland.
- **TESS feature** on how developing outdoor play has supported an impressive improvement journey for Scottish school.
- Review for Audit Scotland on **pupils' views** of new schools.
- Further advice on the use of **fallen trees as climbing structures**.
- Further information on providing **sand play** in schools.



# Playground placemaking

The character of a place has an impact on how we feel and behave. Places have meanings. They are part of the 'emotional geography' that helps us interpret and understand the world around us. Placemaking is about creating spaces that have positive meanings. It's about creating spaces where people want to be; spaces that promote health, happiness, and well being. It's about making places that feel welcoming and attractive; places that celebrate local distinctiveness and places that create a sense of belonging and ownership. Placemaking is an approach to design that can play a significant role in developing better school grounds.

A landscape that is safe, attractive, playful and social has a positive impact on how we feel. The reverse is equally true; bland, monotonous and uncared-for spaces create a sense of unease. Researchers who studied this dynamic found that children naturally 'read' the meanings of their playground (see 'Special People; Special Places' link at the end of this section). If it has been designed with their needs and interests in mind then they understand that they are important in that place. Conversely, if the grounds are uncared for, bland and lacking in opportunities; or if the needs of adults (for example car parking and security features) seem to dominate, then children interpret that as meaning that school doesn't value them or their needs.

Another important factor for children and young people is an ability to exert some control over a space. Being able to change a space, look after it, take responsibility for it and personalise it helps to foster a sense of participation, pride and citizenship. It creates a sense of having a meaningful input into school life and decision making, which in turn fosters positive self esteem.

**'A landscape that is safe, attractive, playful and social has a positive impact on how we feel. Bland, monotonous and uncared-for spaces create a sense of unease'**

## Principles for playground placemaking

### Involvement and ownership

Placemaking capitalises on a local community's assets, inspiration, and potential. It gives users of the space opportunities to influence, manage, change and control the space. For this reason, no good place is ever 'finished'. It should be adaptable to changing needs, ideas and visions. Pupils are the key community for school grounds and should be closely involved in planning changes. They spend more time in the grounds than anyone else, will know the spaces more intimately than anyone else and will understand better than anyone else how the spaces work (or not) on a daily basis.

A helpful starting place is a conversation with pupils about the things they value in places that make them feel positive. This can help to create a vision of future possibilities and identify the kinds of emotional states that pupils desire. This conversation can then form the basis of mapping priorities for change. Pupil involvement doesn't minimise the value of appropriate adult expertise in areas such as play design, growing, art or construction. It does mean that pupil ideas should be sought and considered and, if some of their ideas are not feasible then they should receive feedback in a way that supports their learning and understanding.

Where possible, pupils should also take an active role in making the changes; for example planting trees, building outdoor structures or creating artwork. They should also be involved in maintenance of their outdoor places; for example tending the garden, pruning shrubs and clearing litter. This approach offers rich opportunities for 'real world learning' as well as fostering a sense of pride and ownership.

## A word about risk...

**'Children are entitled to take part in physical activities, and to play, including outdoors, and have an opportunity to experience and judge and manage risk'**

### The Early Years Framework

Adults with responsibility for children have a duty of care to ensure that they are not exposed to unnecessary levels of risk. However, there's evidence that in recent years we have allowed concerns about risk to deprive children of important and enriching play experiences. The Health & Safety Executive has expressed concern that this kind of over-protective approach to children's play leaves them ill equipped to manage risk in their adult lives. A survey of Scottish parents carried out by Grounds for Learning and the Scottish Parent Teacher Council found that most parents wanted their children to have access to more adventurous play opportunities.

Judith Hackitt, Chair of Health & Safety Executive explains "Play – and particularly play outdoors – teaches young people how to deal with risk. Without this awareness and learning they are ill equipped to deal with working life. Young people are curious, and they learn quickly. We should not deny them the opportunity to

learn by taking risks. Seeking to protect them from every conceivable hazard, rather than sensibly managing the genuine risks they face, ultimately leaves them in harm's way, not to mention robbing them of memories that last a lifetime."

Interestingly, evidence suggests that introducing the kind of play opportunities described here actually reduces the number of serious playground accidents. More varied and adventurous landscapes seem to raise children's natural levels of risk awareness. For example, when the Forestry Commission evaluated this kind of play in a Glasgow primary school they found a 'dramatic reduction in physical injuries'.

None of this removes the responsibility of schools to think carefully about risk management in play. In recent years, a number of helpful documents have been produced to help adults make sensible judgements about risk without the need for complex and burdensome paperwork.

**Taking it further** Visit the online version for access to:

- The Health & Safety Executive's statement on promoting a **balanced approach to risk** in play.
- Detailed guidance on using the **risk benefit approach** to manage risk in play provision.
- A **survey of Scottish parents** by the Scottish Parent Teacher Council.
- Forestry Commission evaluation showing **reduction of accidents** in a more adventurous school playground.

**Ask yourself...**

**Is your school playground a place to enjoy or a place to endure?**





**Create variety**  
 Many traditional school grounds offer 'monocultures' of large open spaces but children thrive in a more varied habitat with different niches and scales



**Boundaries and connections**

Many schools have discovered that one of the most cost effective ways to improve their outdoor spaces is to change a fence line or create new entrances.

- What impressions do your school grounds create for neighbours and visitors? Do they contribute to or detract from a positive sense of place in your community?
- What 'meanings' are created by your school's boundaries, entrances and signage? Are they attractive and welcoming? Do they support or hinder positive connections and relationships between your school and local community?
- What kinds of spaces are immediately adjacent to your school grounds and what kinds of learning and play opportunities do these spaces afford? Do your school boundaries and entrances support or hinder connections with these potentially valuable environments?
- To what extent is the issue of 'porosity' of your boundaries a physical or a cultural issue?



**Community use**

School grounds can be a valuable community asset that fosters strong community interaction or an island of isolation, separated from the local neighbourhood. School grounds are one of the single biggest assets owned by Local Authorities but their use by pupils in school time is only a small percentage of their full potential. During weekends, evenings and school holidays, some school grounds could become community playgrounds, parks or growing spaces. Some Local Authorities have an active policy of making their grounds open to the public out of school hours. Others are less enthusiastic about this approach, citing vandalism and security as key concerns. Often the 'solution' lies with agreeing cross-departmental responsibilities and budgets so that schools and education departments are not expected to pay for costs that arise out of wider community use. Many Local Authorities are moving towards cross-departmental asset planning and management, which may help to unlock this potential more fully. In Berlin, the grounds of one primary school are a popular venue for children's birthday parties. After school, parents relax with coffee and cake in the attractive grounds while children enjoy the amazing outdoor play features provided by the school. There's a vision to aim for!



**Variety and synergy**

Variety of spaces and possibilities is a key principle in good placemaking. Many traditional school grounds offer 'monocultures' of large open spaces dominated by either asphalt or grassland. However, children thrive in a more varied habitat that provides a range of different niches and scales appropriate to their mood, gender and age; spaces to be active or quiet, social or solitary, competitive or collaborative.

These spaces need to complement each other and an overall zoning plan will provide a helpful way of ensuring balance and the right mix of spaces and opportunities. Primary schools often designate different parts of their playground for different age groups. While this practice has some benefits, schools that have created spaces for children to mingle and play across the age groups report that this encourages better behaviour in older children, who act up into more responsible behaviours.

**Party playground**  
 In Berlin, the grounds of a primary school are a popular venue for children's birthday parties. After school, parents relax with coffee and cake in the attractive grounds while children enjoy the amazing outdoor play features







## Celebrate local

Think how you can make the absolute most of your local context to develop distinctive spaces and learning experiences that help pupils to learn about, celebrate and develop a sense of affection for their local places

### Local distinctiveness

Many of our urban areas suffer from a loss of local distinctiveness. Pupils are often taught by teachers who commute in from other areas and who aren't necessarily familiar with the local area and its history and stories. Think about how you can make the absolute most of your local context to develop distinctive spaces and learning experiences that help pupils to learn about, celebrate and develop a sense of affection for their local places and heritage. This could be the natural heritage; planting locally important plants or encouraging locally important insects. It could be the built heritage; using local materials, techniques and crafts people to create bespoke outdoor shelters and structures. Or it could be any aspect of local history, interpreted and celebrated through outdoor art.



### Seating and meeting

Seating and meeting spaces are important for all age groups, but perhaps particularly for secondary pupils, where comfortable and attractive outdoor spaces to 'hang out' are highly valued. It's important to provide enough seating to avoid creating competition for a scarce resource. Think about providing seating that can accommodate larger groups and provide a useful space for working outdoors with a class. These areas might also benefit from a focal point such as a stage, sculpture or fire pit as well as some tables; useful for writing during outdoor lessons and for outdoor dining. It's also helpful to provide seating that enables smaller groups to form. Informal seating is often popular with pupils and grass banks, boulders, logs, steps, decking and walls all create opportunities for children and young people to create their own seating arrangements.



### Outdoor art

Art can bring beauty, fun and meaning to an outdoor space.

- It can be temporary, for example using natural materials to create land-based transient art in the style of Andy Goldsworthy or the use of chalk to create pavement art.
- Alternatively, it can be more permanent; brightening up a dull wall with a mural or mosaic or creating a sculpture using materials as diverse as living willow, stone, wood or metalwork.
- Art can be designed to enhance other features. For example it can brighten up fences, create a focal point for meeting, customize a seating area or enhance an entrance.



Secondary schools will have many of the required skills for this kind of project in their art and technical departments. Many schools have benefited from working with local artists and craftspeople, some of whom may be parents. Pupils should always be involved in the process of developing outdoor art, partly as an opportunity to enrich the art curriculum but also as a way of creating a sense of involvement, ownership and personalisation of the space. Think about using your local history and heritage as an inspiration for your outdoor art. Alternatively, you could draw on your school's values or the perspectives of the different cultures represented in your school.

## Active spaces

Provide features that encourage pupils to be active. These could be games or skills-focused, like basketball hoops or a volleyball net. One secondary school designed and built their own crazy golf course and operate it as a small business as part of their enterprise programme. Others have created specialist bike skills loops or 'pump tracks' often on very small areas of ground. Alternatively, there are more social approaches to encouraging physical activity. For example, some schools have created surfaced pathways around the perimeter of their grounds to allow pupils to escape the cramped asphalt areas and enjoy a walk and a chat. Decking areas and stages will encourage spontaneous performance, especially if they can be combined with outdoor speakers.



## Sustainability

Good places embody principles of sustainability.

- In school grounds this could be the use of sustainable urban drainage and the creation of temporary soakaways with wetland plants.
- It could be the provision of areas for growing food and facilities for composting and community re-cycling.
- It should include facilities to encourage active travel; secure cycle storage and, in primary schools, covered areas for parents to encourage them to walk their children to school.



**Design for everyone**  
Designing inclusive grounds isn't about ensuring that every feature is accessible to every child but that most experiences are accessible to most children



## Inclusion

The quality of school grounds can either support children with additional needs or make life more difficult for them. Well-designed school grounds can enrich the school experience of many pupils with additional support needs. For example, children with sensory impairments experience more sensory stimulation outdoors than indoors while children with behavioural issues often respond well to opportunities to be more physically active and adventurous. Children who find it difficult to interact socially tend to mix more readily when there is a wider range of play opportunities on offer while children who struggle with classroom learning often do well in more practical outdoor situations.

It's important that children with learning or mobility issues also have the opportunity to experience physical challenges. Designing inclusive grounds isn't about ensuring that every feature is accessible to every child but that most experiences are accessible to most children. For example, how can children with special needs have access to adventure, calm, play, nature and growing and how can this be done in a way that encourages children with different abilities and disabilities to enjoy the outdoors together?

**Taking it further** Visit the online version for access to:

- Discover how schools have extended their physical and cultural boundaries to make better use of adjoining **woodland and natural spaces**.
- **Designing School Grounds** – a UK Government publication that we were involved in producing, now available free online.
- Specialist design guide and CPD programme on **designing inclusive school grounds** for children with special needs.
- The **Special Places; Special People** research report investigates the links between school ground design and children's feelings and behaviours.
- Examples of effective outdoor learning for children and young people with sensory impairments from **SENSE Scotland**.
- Resources for **school design and pupil involvement** from Architecture and Design Scotland.
- **Become a member** and access our image galleries to see a wide range of examples of many of the ideas suggested in this section.
- Search our **free online database** of case studies and advice sheets.



# Design for learning

“Outdoors is often a more effective place to learn than indoors” according to Scottish curriculum guidelines. For most teachers, school grounds are usually the first and most convenient step into the outdoors. Learning outdoors offers hands-on practical approaches. It provides ‘real world learning’ that demonstrates the relevance of subjects to the world beyond the classroom and often generates integrated cross-curriculum learning. Fresh air with higher oxygen concentrations can improve alertness and attention span while being outdoors usually provides greater sensory stimulation. Touch, smell, sound, movement and a richer range of sights can all help enrich learning. Stepping out of the classroom tends to change and improve the dynamics between teacher and learner and between learners. Pupils consistently report higher levels of enjoyment when learning outdoors while teachers report that pupils are often better behaved outdoors because they’re more engaged in their learning. If the task of schools is to prepare pupils for ‘the world out there’ then much of their learning needs to be in ‘the world out there’.

Learning outdoors offers rich opportunities to explore key thematic areas of Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development Education. Recognising its importance, the new General Teaching Council for Scotland professional standards identify outdoor learning as a key element of ‘learning for sustainability’ – a new strand that crosses all the revised standards.

**‘Outdoors is often a more effective place to learn than indoors’**

Scottish Curriculum Guidelines

## Design principles

- Variety is a key principle in designing a quality outdoor learning environment. Any outdoor space will have learning opportunities but a more varied space will present a wider range of options.
- Aesthetics are important; we learn well when we’re in an attractive environment that’s well cared for.
- Comfort is a consideration; sometimes it can be helpful to sit outdoors, to have a surface to lean on and to find shelter from the wind or shade from the sun.
- Teachers will value having a gathering space where they can issue instructions or lead a discussion. Try to locate this somewhere that won’t disturb indoor classes.
- The design of the school building is important. How easy is it for pupils to access the outdoors from their classroom? How easy is it to change into or store outdoor clothing? Are there opportunities to create balconies, rooftops or courtyards that could provide a special kind of outdoor space? How feasible is free flow access between indoor and outdoor areas in nurseries?

- In secondary schools, do the outdoor features link spatially to the departments most likely to use them? For example, is the garden close to the biology or home economics department? Is the pond easily accessible to the biology students? What kind of social space outside the dining hall or assembly hall might be most useful?
- Consider what storage will be required for outdoor materials such as play resources, gardening tools or mountain bikes, and where this storage can be most conveniently located.
- Think about introducing specific outdoor features that could enrich a specific area of the curriculum. A number of examples are given below.

## Taking the curriculum outdoors

Every area of the curriculum can be enriched by making good use of your school grounds. You don’t need to wait until you’ve developed wonderful grounds before taking your learning outdoors, although better spaces will offer a wider range of opportunities. Here’s a taste of some of the many possibilities to give you an idea of what may be possible in your grounds already, as well as to help you think about how your outdoor areas could be enhanced to improve their value for learning.

### Mathematics

- An area of open asphalt and a box of chalk can provide a context for all sorts of fun and challenging outdoor mental maths. Shout out sums and ask teams to race to the correct answer or chalk out graph axes and ask pupils to become data points.
- Nature in your grounds creates many maths opportunities; estimating the volume of a tree trunk or using trigonometry to measure its height, looking for symmetry and patterns like Fibonacci sequences.
- The built environment is full of maths; symmetry, shapes, angles, gradients, heights, areas and distances that can be estimated and measured. How does the diameter and frequency of drain pipes relate to the roof area and can we predict the down pipe flow rate from the rainfall rate?
- A school garden creates many real-world maths opportunities. If the plant spacing is X cm and we want to grow Y number of plants, how big do the beds need to be? If the germination percentage is G, how many seeds do we need to sow? How much will it cost us to buy the materials and what is the market value of the produce? What’s our profit (or loss) and our annual rate of return?

### Sciences

- Planet Earth can’t be seriously studied without getting outside. Grounds can be used to explore biodiversity, interdependence, energy sources, the carbon cycle, photosynthesis, pollination, sustainability and the process of climate change. Much of this learning will be enhanced by creating a variety of habitat types. Boulders can illustrate major rock types and the process of fossilisation.
- Where better to study the weather than outside? Build a weather station and measure rainfall, temperature and wind speeds. Create a sun dial and study the movement of the sun and shadows through the day and the year. Explore cloud formation and types and learn about the prevailing wind directions and the impact of wind direction on temperature and rainfall.
- Explore the equations of motion on a larger scale. Investigate forces, resistance and aerodynamics with rockets, kites, paper planes, parachutes, levers and catapults. Experiment with different designs and learn how and why this impacts on their performance. How could you estimate the speed of sound outdoors?
- Create a fire pit to explore the science of fire and of cooking, as well as to create a focal point for story telling.

### Health and wellbeing

- A lack of indoor PE facilities is often cited as a reason for not providing enough PE time in the curriculum. With appropriate clothing, your grounds can become a quality outdoor PE space in all but the most inclement weather. Dedicated sports pitches or other open areas are useful but can be complemented with features such as hoops, nets, targets painted on the ground, traversing walls, bike skills loops, trim trails, cross-country running circuits and orienteering.
- Part of the power of school grounds is that, through play and recreation, they can provide significant health and wellbeing benefits out of formal class time. Developing a sense of place, enriching nature and providing opportunities for free play helps pupils to be active, develop physical skills, learn to manage risk, build supportive relationships and feel happy and fulfilled.

**Get started now!**  
You don’t need to wait until you’ve developed wonderful grounds before taking your learning outdoors





### Expressive arts

- Outdoors can provide a fitting setting for the performance of drama, dance and music. Providing a dedicated outdoor performance area such as a stage or amphitheatre will make formal performances more practicable but will also tend to encourage informal use during break time.
- A varied and attractive outdoor space can provide inspiration for a wide range of expressive arts as well as a stimulating space for creating and exhibiting art in many of its forms.
- It can also provide natural materials for use in various art forms and, as considered in the Placemaking section can provide a space for the creation of sculptures, carvings, murals, mosaics and various forms of temporary art.

### Languages

- Teachers often report that being outdoors stimulates higher quality creative writing and poetry than is possible indoors. This isn't just the case in good weather; schools have used snow to stimulate writing about the Inuit, storms to inspire pirate stories and dark gloomy winter afternoons as a context for creating spooky tales.
- Create fantasy characters and landscapes from clay and natural materials and then write their stories.
- One school reenacted the classic 'Bear Hunt' story in their grounds in Gaelic (see the Taking it further section) while others have used the links between Scotland's native trees and letters of the Gaelic alphabet to create a Gaelic tree trail.
- Trees and shrubs can be labelled in English and Latin and a range of outdoor features can be labelled in languages that are being taught in the school or which are represented in the school community.
- The outdoors can often provide a more imaginative context for story telling; whether sitting round a fire, below a tree or under a tarpaulin in the rain.

### Religious and moral education

- School grounds have the potential to be places where children experience awe and wonder at the beauty and complexity of the natural world. They can provide calm in the bustle of a busy school day. Create a space that will encourage contemplation using nature and features such as water and art.
- Ask pupils to sit quietly on the ground (even in the rain) for 5 minutes. Ask them to observe and experience what's around them, from the tiny details of a bug to the clouds overhead, and then to write a sentence or two. You'll be amazed at the depth of emotion and insight that emerges.
- Mark out a labyrinth on your grass with sand, ask your grounds maintenance crew to mow the lines and explore how labyrinths have been used to slow down and reflect.
- Incorporate faith symbols into outdoor art, create Rangoli patterns and display important texts from different faith and philosophical traditions.
- Use your grounds to explore religious festivals or the telling of important faith narratives in story, music, dance or drama.

### Social studies

- Bring history to life with outdoor battle re-enactments. Measure out just how far the soldier leapt at the Pass of Killiecrankie and see how far pupils can jump.
- Mark out the size of one of the pyramids to get a sense of its scale.
- Build an Anderson Shelter and sit inside to learn about the Blitz.
- Use twigs to write your name in Viking Runes.
- One school created a medieval roundhouse in their grounds. Explore pre-industrial technologies such as basketwork from willow grown in your grounds, cooking traditional edible plants such as nettles or dandelions, fire lighting with a flint or making rope from natural fibres.

- Outdoor geography opportunities are almost endless. Explore the weather. Measure evaporation by chalking the perimeter of a puddle as it evaporates through the school day. Learn about rivers by creating water rills (or getting outside in heavy rain to watch them form naturally) and looking for erosion and deposition.
- Create physical maps of your grounds or map how the spaces are used at break time. Look at first edition OS maps of your school or ask your local community for early photographs of the site. Compare these with Google's satellite view. Are any of the original features still present? How and why have they changed?
- Paint a world or regional map on the ground or create temporary maps with chalk and sand to help pupil's understand spatial relationships between the UK's towns or the major continents.

### Technologies

- Many of the features described in this guide can be designed and created by pupils as part of their technologies study. Simple projects include bird boxes, feeders and baths. One school set pupils the task of designing a box that could be used by birds and bats. Add an IT component by designing in a web cam.
- Loose materials such as planks, crates and ropes can be used to set design challenges such as building bridges or temporary structures.
- More complex projects include the creation of bespoke seating and shelters. The technology department of one secondary school created a metal shelter with the school's motto and logo. Others have created green oak shelters with living roofs.
- Build and test your own wind turbine or tin can solar heaters. Computer aided design can be used for these individual features, as well as for creating a more comprehensive design plan for the whole outdoor area.
- A larger scale outdoor improvement project can use online surveys to gather pupil views and a blog to share progress.
- Growing your own produce enriches the teaching of food technologies and several schools have built their own outdoor ovens.

**Taking it further** Visit the online version for access to:

- Free online database of **outdoor lesson ideas** for you school grounds, searchable by curriculum subject and age group.
- A summary of research evidence on the **benefits of outdoor learning** published by the Field Studies Council.
- Comprehensive range of **resources on outdoor learning** from Education Scotland website.
- A number of enthusiastic outdoor teachers share their ideas on **online blogs**. Have a look at what they're doing and consider sharing your own ideas and experiences with others online.
- Watch the lovely film of the 'Bear Hunt' **story in Gaelic!**



**Training**  
We can help you become an effective and confident outdoor teacher. Find out more about our training programmes.





# Children need nature

Until a couple of hundred years ago, wherever humans lived, we were living very near to nature and experiencing the natural world up close on a daily basis. Over millennia, the evolutionary process has equipped us for this kind of living. As a species, our natural habitat is outdoor natural space.

With most species, a sudden and dramatic change of habitat will cause significant disruption, stress and in some cases even extinction. The radical decline in children's access to nature in the last three generations is well evidenced. One recent study concluded that in the UK fewer than 10% of children play regularly in natural spaces, compared to 40% of adults when they were young. Children are growing up in an indoor, sedentary and virtual world that is radically different to the kind of environment that they have been 'designed' for. As this happens, we're understanding more clearly just how significant regular access to nature is for children's health and wellbeing:

- Regular access to nature has been shown to have a calming and restorative effect that helps to improve mental wellbeing. For example, researchers report that children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) who play regularly in green play settings have milder symptoms than children who play in built outdoor and indoor settings.
- When children access natural spaces, they are usually physically active and developing physical competencies.
- Natural spaces are almost always great play spaces, offering all the benefits of play described earlier.

## Nature needs children

Children's shrinking experiences of nature are leading to a growing ignorance of the natural world. One study reported that 50% of children can't tell the difference between a bee and a wasp; yet 90% can recognise a Dalek! Most children (and their teachers) recognise big brand logos far more readily

than the leaves of the UK's main tree species. It's not just knowledge about nature that suffers from a lack of first hand experience; children who don't have these experience often grow up without any real sense of emotional connection with nature. What they don't experience and know, they don't value – a fact that's of increasing concern in the nature conservation movement in the UK.

## The importance of school playgrounds

Against this background, the value of providing children with access to nature in their school playgrounds is clear. Occasional school visits to areas of higher natural quality will always be important but school playgrounds have the potential to give children daily direct contact with nature throughout the seasons.

School grounds also offer valuable opportunities for children to be stewards of nature, and not just students of nature. Every pupil has the potential to be a land manager by taking an active role in helping to develop and look after nature in their grounds. Taking practical action for nature in this way is a key element in building life-long respect for nature.

**'Playful unmediated contact with nature before the age of 11 is a potent pathway towards shaping environmental attitudes and behaviours in adulthood'**

Lester & Maudsley

## Design principles

### What's there already?

It's helpful to begin by looking closely to find out what plants and animals are already in your school grounds. You may be surprised by what's already there – some schools have had badger setts in their grounds for years without anyone in the school ever knowing! Recruit the help of someone locally who knows a bit about local wildlife to help you with this – your Countryside Ranger should be able to help. If there's anything particularly interesting or special then start by doing what you can to protect it.

**'Every learner should have the opportunity for contact with nature in their school grounds on a daily basis and throughout the seasons...'**

Scottish Government

**'Fewer than 10% of children play regularly in natural spaces'**

The National Trust

### Less is more

One of the great things about nature is that it's always trying to develop in your playground by itself. Often our preoccupation with tidiness keeps nature at bay – and by reducing levels of cutting and spraying we can give nature a boost and save money at the same time.

If you can, leave some of your grass uncut until later in the summer when the grass heads have formed and any wildflowers have flowered. This will create a useful habitat for insects and you might be surprised at the range of wildflowers that are already there. Most schools use chemical sprays to control weeds in verges and shrubberies. Why not experiment with letting the weeds grow? Formal shrub areas are often pruned every year to keep them looking neat. Why not let them grow a bit bigger and wilder to create better habitat for birds?





### Free plants!

- The Woodland Trust often offers free native trees to schools – for details visit [www.woodlandtrust.org.uk](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk)
- Or why not collect tree seeds in autumn, sow them into pots and make your own mini tree nursery?
- Ask your parents and local garden centres to donate free plants

### Plant, plant, plant!

One of the best things you can do to bring nature into your playground is plant trees, shrubs and wildflowers – especially species that are native to the area where you live.

- Even a few trees will make a big difference over time, and some school playgrounds have space for lots of tree planting. Clackmannanshire Council offered a grant to schools with large areas of grass to create open woodland areas because they calculated that over the longer term there would be a financial saving as a result of less grass maintenance. Even if all you have is asphalt, consider digging up some small areas to create space for a few trees.
- Shrubs will often grow quickly, flower profusely and attract lots of insects. Many will also provide berries for the birds in winter. If you're stuck for space then grow them along walls and boundaries. Willow is a wonderful shrub for growing in schools – fast growing, robust and able to be woven into dens, tunnels and other interesting structures. Within a year or two it will be generating prunings that you can use for other willow features, craft activities like basketwork, or to donate to your neighbouring schools.
- Grow wildflowers. If you have trees then find out what native woodland flowers you could plant below them. If you're leaving some grassland uncut then you can plant wildflower plugs into this area to make it more interesting. If you have a school garden then plant some wildflowers to encourage insects that will help to control the pests in your garden. If all you have is asphalt then use planters and pots to make a home for wildflowers. Some schools have successfully created larger wildflower meadows by stripping off the turf and topsoil and sowing a wildflower seed mix. This is an ambitious project that needs careful planning, but with the right advice the results can be stunning.



### Watery wildlife

Any water in your school grounds will help to attract wildlife. Half the UK's ponds were lost in the 20th century – so a school pond is a great way of enriching wildlife by attracting frogs, newts and a range of aquatic plant and insect life. Many schools have been able to develop a pond in a way that adequately addresses safety concerns and which allows the school to teach children about water safety.

- A school pond doesn't need to be deep and if necessary could be fenced off or even covered with a metal grill. Why not start with a 'mini pond'? You can use virtually any watertight container; old enamel sinks and stone troughs work well or choose a glazed ceramic plant pot with no hole.
- If a pond is too much of a challenge then consider creating a bog garden. Excavate a wide and shallow hole, ideally in a damp area. Line it with a pond liner and then fill with peat and soil that's rich in organic matter. A bog garden can look beautiful – you'll be surprised at how native wildflowers will thrive in boggy conditions.

### Creepy Crawlies

Children often have a fascination with insects – and your school grounds should be a place where they can readily find and handle them. Many of the suggestions above will encourage insects, but you can create small habitats that will encourage insects. A log pile or stone pile is probably the easiest and most effective, but you can also make more specialist 'houses' for insects like bees, ladybirds or lacewings.

### Mammal life

A few schools are lucky enough to enjoy badgers and deer, but most schools can encourage smaller mammals like voles and hedgehogs. Trees, shrubs, long grass and wood piles will all help. One school placed a large sheet of Perspex in long grass and covered it with old carpet. Within a few months, voles had started to create runs below the Perspex – and lifting the carpet allowed pupils a wonderful window into the world of voles. Bat boxes and hedgehog boxes can be effective and make a good woodwork project for older pupils.

### Birds

If you've enriched your school grounds with trees, shrubs, meadows and a pond then you'll be well on your way to encouraging birds. You can instantly bring more birds into your school grounds by putting up feeders – and there are lots of simple designs that can be made by pupils. You can also make a simple bird bath by digging a small hole, lining it with concrete and then digging it out to relocate wherever you wish. Bird boxes allow children to watch the wonderful process of nesting and hatching and many schools have invested in web cam boxes to allow them watch this up close. One school used the nesting process as a stimulus for creative writing with children naming the chicks and writing a weekly 'soap opera' about the goings on in the nest.

**Taking it further** Visit the online version for access to:

- The **John Muir Award** provides a great structure for upper primary and secondary pupils to explore and take action for nature in your school grounds.
- Your starting point for **advice on gardening for wildlife**, linking to resources from a wide range of partners.
- More information on **biodiversity and the school estate** from SNH.
- Information on the loss of children's first hand experiences of nature from the **National Trust**.
- For advice on collecting seed and growing your own trees from the **Tree Council**.
- Research report on impact of regular play in green settings on **children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)**.
- Now get going and raise a generation of nature enthusiasts!





# Get growing!

At a time when pupils are increasingly disconnected from nature, the seasons and the process of food production, it's more important than ever that they grow their own food. Understanding food production is only one benefit of a school garden. It can support learning across the curriculum in areas such as numeracy, literacy, technologies and science. It provides a context for physical activity and supports a healthier diet by encouraging children to try eating things that they have grown. It fosters team work and a sense of shared enterprise and often encourages gardening in adulthood. School gardens can also be designed to be attractive social spaces as well as to provide important habitats for wildlife.

School gardens can take on many different forms, sizes and structures; from a few small planters to the use of balconies and flat roofs for growing. Some schools have square meter gardens that pupils can 'rent' for the year while others with limited space use wall gardening to grow salads and herbs. A number of secondary schools operate commercial enterprises that support vocational skills in growing, food preparation and business.



## Planning tips

**Don't bite off more than you can chew** A garden that's too big to maintain will demotivate staff and pupils. Start small and extend as your experience and confidence grows.

**Plan with the summer holidays in mind** Choose crops that are ready to harvest after you return or set up a system where pupils and community members carry out essential maintenance over the summer.

**Get help!** Find parents and local community members who can provide advice, donate plants and seed and lend a few hours of free labour at busy times. Your local allotments or horticultural society is often a good place to start.

**Consider a joint venture with your local community** Could you provide growing space for people in your community in return for a small fee to pay for your materials and some of their labour to help with bigger tasks?

**Create a dedicated growing area for each class** This will help to spread the workload and allow everyone to be involved.

**Involve your kitchen staff and home economics department** Make sure that pupils cook and consume the food that they grow. Can you add value by making pickles and preserves that you can sell to pay for tools and seeds?

**There's more to food than fruit and veg** Some schools keep bees while others rear chickens, both of which can be options in urban schools. Some schools with more space keep sheep, pigs and goats.

## Designing your garden

A good design will make your gardening more enjoyable and successful. Get help to plan it from an experienced gardener if you can. Choose a site that will be secure and accessible. Ideally it should be in a reasonably sunny and sheltered location. Protect your garden from wind and unwanted through-traffic with a fence or hedge. A water supply is essential so consider installing an outside tap or a water butt. Some form of storage for tools and equipment will be necessary; ideally outside and nearby. Raised beds are often easiest to maintain but need to be narrow enough for pupils to reach the centre. Consider providing a space for teachers to demonstrate tasks and for pupils to write up their learning. Other features that will improve the garden include an area to wash crops and hands, a compost bin or wormery, a greenhouse (or polytunnel) and a space to cook and eat the harvest. Seating, art works, wildflowers and ornamental signage will also add to the uniqueness of the site and the atmosphere created.

## Plant an orchard!

A school orchard can be a simple way to begin or extend your food growing. Hundreds of Scottish schools have created an orchard in recent years, often growing traditional and local varieties to support their conservation. If space is tight, fruit trees can be grown along walls and fences or be pruned to create a linear feature around a social area. Compared to a vegetable garden, they have limited maintenance requirements and produce a crop that's ready after the summer holidays.

**'At a time when pupils are increasingly disconnected from nature, the seasons and the process of food production, it's more important than ever that they grow their own food'**



**Taking it further** Visit the online version for access to:

- The **Royal Horticultural Society** has a website dedicated to supporting schools to grow food. You'll find detailed advice on everything you need to know to set up and run a successful school garden as well as school garden case studies from across the UK.
- Download a free copy of our **School Orchards Guide** for inspiration and advice on creating and learning through a school orchard. You can also find out how a range of **Scottish schools have used a school orchard** to support learning across the curriculum.
- **Food and the Environment** is one of Eco-Schools Scotland's ten topics. Visit their online topic pages for ideas and resources to support learning about food.





**'It could be frustrating for people seeing our playground and thinking how could we do that? But here's the important message: make a start. Work with your children, open your eyes, use your ears, use your senses and do what you need to do'**

Head teacher

#### Link with other schools

What scope is there for a primary and secondary school to work together, with older pupils carrying out some of the heavier and more technical tasks? How could practical outdoors projects support transitions between school stages? Think about how pupils and teachers can share their ideas and learning with other schools, either through visits or online.

#### Persevere

Expect a few setbacks along the way. Many schools with great grounds have suffered vandalism at some point. However, they persevered, viewing the setback as a learning opportunity, fostering an attitude of persistence and building increased pupil and community ownership in the project. Things might not work out quite how you plan so pilot new ideas, adapt, evolve and use problems as a great source of 'real world learning' for pupils.

#### Resourcing

Your number one challenge is almost certainly not funding. Many of the ideas in this guide are low-cost or free. Think about what you can do with the resources already in your school and wider community. Ask parents, colleagues, neighbours, friends and local businesses for materials, expertise and labour. Make use of your local Countryside Ranger for advice and your community service team for labour. Focus initially on bespoke solutions rather than on expensive catalogue options. For example, it might take a lot of fundraising to install a trim trail when you could provide many of the same opportunities (and more) by sourcing logs from your local tree surgeon and boulders from your nearest quarry. More ambitious landscaping projects will usually require some kind of fundraising. Funding opportunities change regularly but you can keep in touch with the latest opportunities through the communications channels described below.

**Taking it further** Visit the online version for access to:

- Our free online database of **case studies and advice sheets**.
- Our **short films** offer a range of inspiring ideas for developing and using your grounds more effectively.
- Funding opportunities change regularly. Sign up for our regular free **e-bulletin** of funding opportunities as well as inspiration, ideas and resources. You can also access the same information more regularly through **facebook** or **twitter**.
- We provide training on how to develop and use your school grounds effectively. Details of scheduled **training events** are here or follow the links to find out about INSET training for **early years, primary** or **secondary schools**. We also offer a wide range of **online CPD** for early years practitioners and teachers.
- We can **visit your school** to advise on how you can improve your grounds for outdoor learning and play.
- The **Physical Activity & Health Alliance** web site is your starting point for anything related to physical activity in Scotland.
- If you only watch one **short film** about physical activity, make it this one.
- Go for it!

# Making it happen...

Now that you're inspired to transform your school grounds into a space that supports the health, wellbeing and learning of your pupils, here are a few final thoughts on how to ensure success.

#### Maximise involvement

Get pupils involved in planning and making the changes. This will create many practical learning opportunities and will help to foster a sense of ownership and pride. Maximise the involvement of staff; you may find a range of useful skills and contacts and if you rely on one enthusiastic staff member then you'll struggle when that person moves on. Get your parents and wider community involved in donating expertise, time and materials. Carry out a skills audit of parents and don't be afraid to ask for donations of the materials that you need. There may not be many dads on your Parent Council but the chances are you'll find them willing to volunteer for practical outdoor tasks. Many schools organise occasional weekend work parties, which are often a fun social way for parents to get to know each other.

#### Get specialist advice

Children's views are important, but so is the advice of adults with appropriate expertise in areas such as play design, landscaping, horticulture, building, outdoor art and rural crafts. The best results will come when these adults work alongside children to develop and deliver ideas together.

**'Improving your school grounds isn't a one-off project; it's an approach to learning that will develop and evolve over many years'**



#### Plan well

Improving your school grounds isn't a one-off 'project'. Think of it as an approach to learning that will develop and evolve over many years. It's helpful to develop a cohesive long term plan and then work your way through a little bit of it each year as funding and time allows. A helpful starting point is to begin by identifying the kinds of experiences that you want pupils to have and then working out what the best options for creating these experiences will be. Think carefully about maintenance of any new features. Some maintenance tasks can be carried out effectively by pupils but heavier tasks will require adult help and some, for example inspecting fixed play equipment, will require specialist skills.







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**In England and Wales** Learning through Landscapes Telephone 01962 846258 Email [enquiries@ltl.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@ltl.org.uk) Website [www.ltl.org.uk](http://www.ltl.org.uk)



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