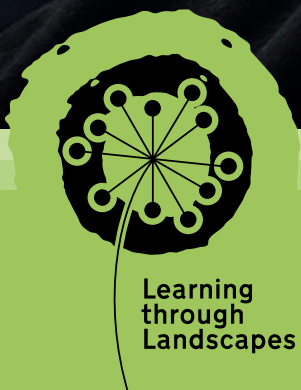


Perspectives on Play

The role of play in breaktimes
and transition to Secondary school



Perspectives on Play captures a combination of findings, feedback and information from a 2021 Better Breaktimes, Better Transitions project.

It highlights issues, challenges and opportunities raised by S1 pupils (aged 11-12) and teachers, combined with contemporary opinions and research on school breaktimes and adolescent play.

Ways to use Perspectives on Play

Use Perspectives on Play to reflect on play provision in Secondary settings and to prompt discussion.

Play is a fundamental right of children and young people. Extensive policy support is in place in Scotland, however a greater focus is given to early years and Primary education settings compared to Secondary schools and adolescent contexts.

- How do S1 pupils spend their breaktimes in school? How do they want to...?
- Are the possibilities and benefits that play can bring to pupils in Secondary schools being fully embraced?
- What does 'Adolescent Play' look like? How is it differ to other ages?
- Can better play environments and opportunities in Secondary schools help pupils' transition from Primary school?

Throughout autumn 2021 nearly 300 S1 students from six Secondary schools in the Falkirk Council region took part in the Better Breaktimes, Better Transitions project. They co-designed and contributed to over 30 consultations and workshops to explore what they want from play in Secondary school, how their school grounds could be improved, and how experiences of outdoor play could help to make positive transitions from Primary to Secondary school.

Commissioned and funded by the Scottish Government's Get Into Summer initiative, Better Breaktimes, Better Transitions: The project was delivered by Learning through Landscapes in partnership with Play Scotland and Falkirk Council in six Secondary schools in the Falkirk region.

Report written and compiled by Rob Bushby, 'Better Breaktimes, Better Transitions' Project Manager for Learning through Landscapes. All photos by Malcolm Cochrane.



“First of all, don't take 'play' to mean anything idle, wasteful or frivolous. This is 'play' as the philosophers understood it: the experience of being an active, creative and fully autonomous person.”

Pat Kane, 'The Play Ethic'



“Can we play some more?”

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Secondary School Play

What is Play?

It's freely chosen and self-directed activity.

It's pupil-led and managed, chosen for its own sake rather than for other outcomes or ends.

What is Breaktime?

It's time without direct teacher control – time away from adult-directed or other 'enforced' activity.

As well as a break from studies, it's time for meeting essential needs such as toilet breaks, buying and eating food.

It can be spent in school grounds or inside, and includes lunchtime.

“All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity. Play is fundamental to the healthy development and wellbeing of individuals and communities.”

Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group,
Cardiff 2005

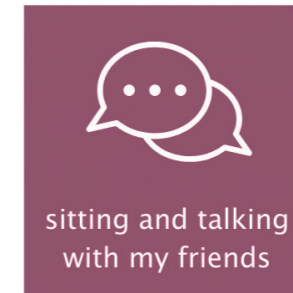
Fundamentals of play explored through Better Breaktimes, Better Transitions

- It's something pupils choose to do, of their own volition; they're not made to do it
- It's not curriculum activity
- It's in pupils' own time, their down time
- It's something they'd like to do or try
- It's (often) sociable
- It's enjoyable
- It's flexible
- It can be non-productive, non-functional
- It's creative

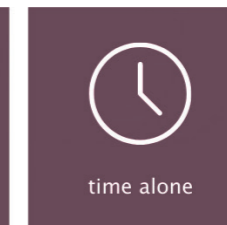
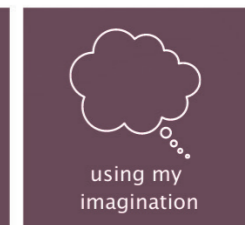
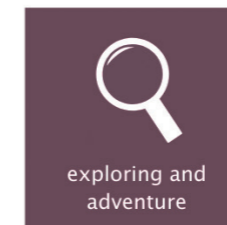
“What does play mean to you?”

When 46 S1 pupils were asked what play means to them this is how they responded.

Top 3:



And also...



Teachers described play as:

“Unstructured recreation”

“Imagination, expression, enquiry”

“Intrinsically motivated, freely chosen”

“Active, social, fun”

Play in a Secondary school context

“For pupils, breaktimes are some of the most valued times and experiences they have in school.”

“Secondary schools saw breaks in more functional terms [than Primary schools] as important times for eating and drinking, energy release, physical exercise and getting fresh air than valuing it for the social opportunity it provides.”

“Pupils are overwhelmingly positive about break times and particularly the longer lunch break which 87% of pupils liked or really liked. Very few pupils (5%) expressed a dislike of these times. Higher percentages of pupils like breaktimes than they do school in general, lessons and/or mealtimes.”

“The BaSiS project findings show that there is currently a lack of clarity about the purpose of break times in school and how they may contribute to the broader aims of school, education and development.”

6 main recommendations arose:

- Schools should carefully consider the time available for breaks.
- Schools should aim to develop a policy on breaks in the school day.
- Schools should consult and work with pupils to enable them to have a say on break times.
- Schools should reconsider the practice of withholding break time as an individual or group sanction or for pupils to complete work, especially if this is routinely used.
- Schools should review their approach to the training of supervisors.
- Policy makers should consider legislating for time for pupils to have breaks.

‘School break and lunch times and young people’s social lives: A follow-up national study’, Ed Baines and Peter Blatchford, Nuffield Foundation, 2019.

Key Issues

Framing: Defining the idea of play for teachers and pupils in Secondary school settings.

“Pupils haven’t jumped at the idea of play – they’ve scoffed at it.”

Teacher

“I would play more games or board games outdoors, but it’s tricky at High School.”

S1 Pupil

“What are the culturally appropriate names for play among youth? Hanging out, mucking about, chillin, being with friends?”

Dr Greg Mannion, Senior Lecturer, University of Stirling

“Educational principles and wellbeing benefits that we think are so important in Primary years evaporate in the 6 weeks of summer holiday before Secondary school.

Yet the research into play is clear and unequivocal: play benefits health & well-being, behaviour and academic achievement.

Too many young people are spending time in dull and uninspiring outdoor environments at school, and missing out on life-enhancing experiences.”

‘11-18 Secondary School Play: Views and voices from Scottish schools’, Matt Robinson, Learning through Landscapes, 2014.

“Look out for the actual use of play and understanding of play in Secondary schools.”
Education officer



“They are different to other year groups’ spaces.”

Play Spaces in Secondary school

School grounds are one of the few places that all children and young people visit, on a regular basis, that are free of traffic and fears of strangers.

“What are your spaces?”

S1 pupils were asked to describe their areas for play and what these spaces mean to them.

“Where we feel safe.”

“Where we can be more active.”

“I find friends and sit where they are.”

“We have more options than Primary school – we can go indoors, outdoors, offsite.”

Many pupils reported using existing features in the school grounds as informal gathering spaces, such as the overhang of a building, outdoor areas close to the school building that give easy access back to class, or athletic areas such as “the red long jump strip”.

What would create more opportunities for you to play and feel better in your spaces?

“Adults allowing us to choose our play.”

“Long seating for the hill so that people can sit down together.”

“Loose Parts resources create opportunities.”

“Fixed basketball hoops on the wall could be better, so we can also use them after school as well.”

S1 students also requested benches, a trampoline, picnic tables to allow them to sit and eat outside, and more bins.

Key Issues

Personal sense of safety... School grounds are territorial

“I choose to spend breaktimes in the library – it’s a safe space.”

“You are recognised as an S1 by your blazer.”

“There are ‘no go’ areas...There’s ‘ownership’ of seats & tables...control of space.”

“If the woodland space wasn’t overrun with Seniors, I’d be here a lot more.”

“There are some places S1s can’t go because of the Seniors.”

A clear ‘Better Breaktimes Better Transitions’ focus group message emerged:

“All students have identified negative experiences outdoors since starting Secondary school. They all identified places within the grounds they could and couldn’t go because of the presence of older students.” Squeezed out by Seniors, space for socialising and play is reduced.

S1 focus group proposal to improve interaction across school years:

“Create opportunities to support positive student interaction outdoors; involve older students with S1s in design and creation to promote pride and ownership; create a dedicated outdoor area for S1-S3 students.”



“A lot of my friends like to stay inside. There are green areas outside, but they’re known for dodgy behaviour and where the Seniors hang out – and there are less teachers outdoors.”

Suitable physical space

Many Secondary school grounds take a formulaic approach to outdoor spaces, incorporating bench seating, hard surfacing, large open spaces, and sport opportunities in the form of Multiple Use Games Areas and sports pitches. This can lead to less variety in play opportunities than in Primary school; outdoor spaces are often used for other purposes. Some pupils reported the need for time alone and quiet spaces.

“I find the playground very busy and overcrowded.”

“I go to the library inside or the quiet part of the pitch outside where there are less people.”

“Can we access existing school garden spaces at break and lunchtime – for a quieter, calmer alternative to the main tarmac spaces?”

“Minibuses fill the quad – what could be our space is used as a car park.”

In four participating schools, S1 children were permitted to leave school grounds at lunchtime, expanding their exposure to physical spaces.

“We have the freedom to go to Tesco at lunchtime, it’s sociable, it’s a good privilege.”

During focus groups with S1 students, two main priorities emerged: more group seating and more opportunities for physical play.

“Lack of physical spaces to stimulate play in Secondary schools is a significant factor in the drop in measured physical activity and play.”

School grounds with smaller discrete areas can support small group interactions where pupils can demonstrate their emerging physical, social or intellectual skills to a trusted audience (Hughes, 2009). Conversely, flat, open spaces of hard surfaces don’t support this social agenda (Baines, 2006).

“In 2005, nearly 20% of Scottish Secondary schools were reporting loss of school grounds space in the past decade; 20% reported that grounds were too small for learning and play purposes. Changes to playground spaces and affordance can achieve as much as an excellent PE department.”

‘The Value of Play in 11–18 Secondary Schools’, Matt Robinson, 2014.

More time

“The half hour lunch break was identified as a big issue by a large majority of S1 pupils. Limited time impacts not only on the amount of time away from class, but restricts outdoor activity such as not being able to access the Astro or access sports equipment. It used to be 45 mins, but 30 mins is all we’ve known.”

S1 focus group

Staff feedback highlighted the impact of COVID–19 socialisation restrictions as the reason for reduced time at lunch, though some concerns were shared that the restrictions might remain indefinitely.

“Since 1995 breaktimes have been reduced by an average of 65 minutes per week at Secondary schools. The main reasons given by schools are to create more time for teaching and learning, and to manage or limit perceived poor behaviour of students.”

‘School break and lunch times and young people’s social lives: A follow-up national study’, Ed Baines and Peter Blatchford, Nuffield Foundation, 2019.

“For many pupils there is barely enough time at break to undertake the practical functions of eating and toileting. This was already highlighted (Baines, 2006) as a trend that was appearing and recognised it was worse amongst Secondary schools.”

‘The Value of Play in 11–18 Secondary Schools’, Matt Robinson, 2014.

“The reason I want to go in the outdoor quad space is it’s not like the other spaces, it’s calmer and quieter.”



**“It’s all about
being with
my friends.”**
Participating pupil

Reconnecting and Sociability

Breaktime for adolescents is, first and foremost, an opportunity for social interaction without direct adult supervision. It’s free play.

Following disruption and restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the opportunities to re-connect and socialise was even more important for Secondary school pupils.

“I have great ideas when I play with my friends.
I was cooking!”

“There are never enough seats.”

“We used to hang out by the container, but now we go to those two trees, ‘cause there’s more cover and less people can see.”

Participating pupils

“I think we need to consider staff attitudes – ‘play vs policing’. We need to change our school grounds culture and ethos.”

Education Officer

“It may be that breaktimes are one of the few remaining opportunities that children have for sustained interaction with each other on their own terms and on the issues, activities and topics of interest and value to them.

These contexts offer significant opportunities for the development of important skills and understandings that are not often learned in other contexts such as the classroom, in many adult-led after-school clubs or at home.”

‘School break and lunch times and young people’s social lives: A follow-up national study’, Ed Baines and Peter Blatchford, Nuffield Foundation, 2019.

“There are striking differences across S1 pupils as they progress developmentally; school grounds and their culture needs to support this. The social (and physical) play that adolescents engage in needs to be seen in their own contexts rather than those of adults.”

‘The Value of Play in 11–18 Secondary Schools’, Matt Robinson, 2014.

“Pupils valued breaks first and foremost for the opportunity they provide to socialise with friends. They also valued the opportunity for some free time, and the chance to choose what they wanted to do and/or to engage in playful activities. Since 2006, all pupils, but particularly Secondary-aged pupils, were more likely to value lunch time as time to eat and drink and less likely as a chance to get physical exercise.”

‘School break and lunch times and young people’s social lives: A follow-up national study’, Ed Baines and Peter Blatchford, Nuffield Foundation, 2019.



Transition from Primary to Secondary school

S1 focus groups explored contrasts and similarities between their Primary and Secondary school play experiences.

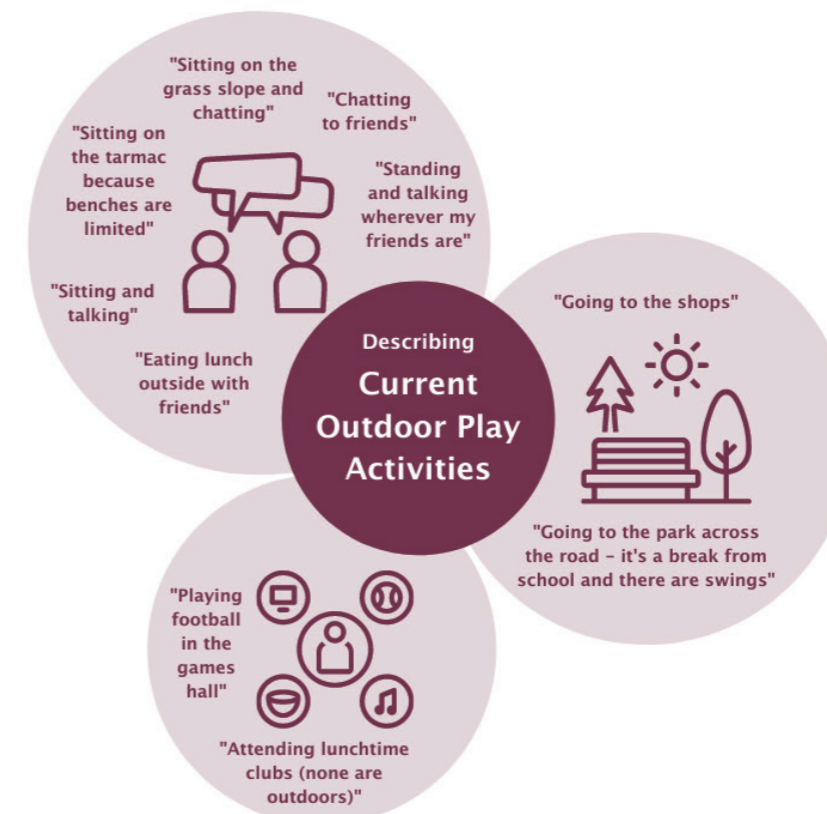
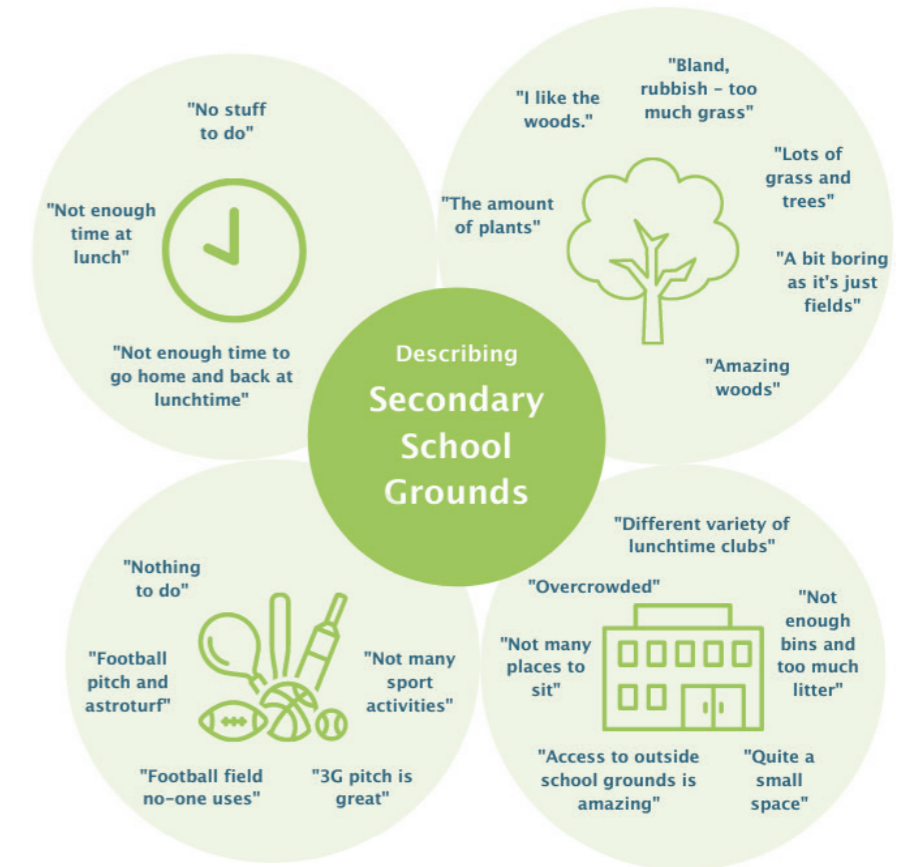
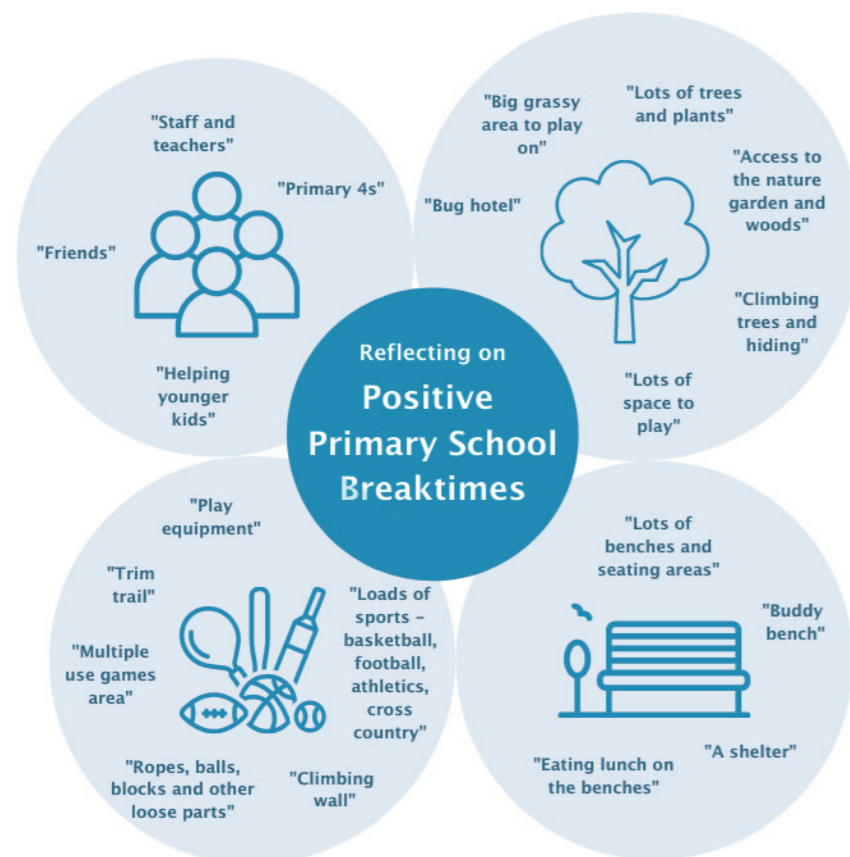
Teacher perspectives:

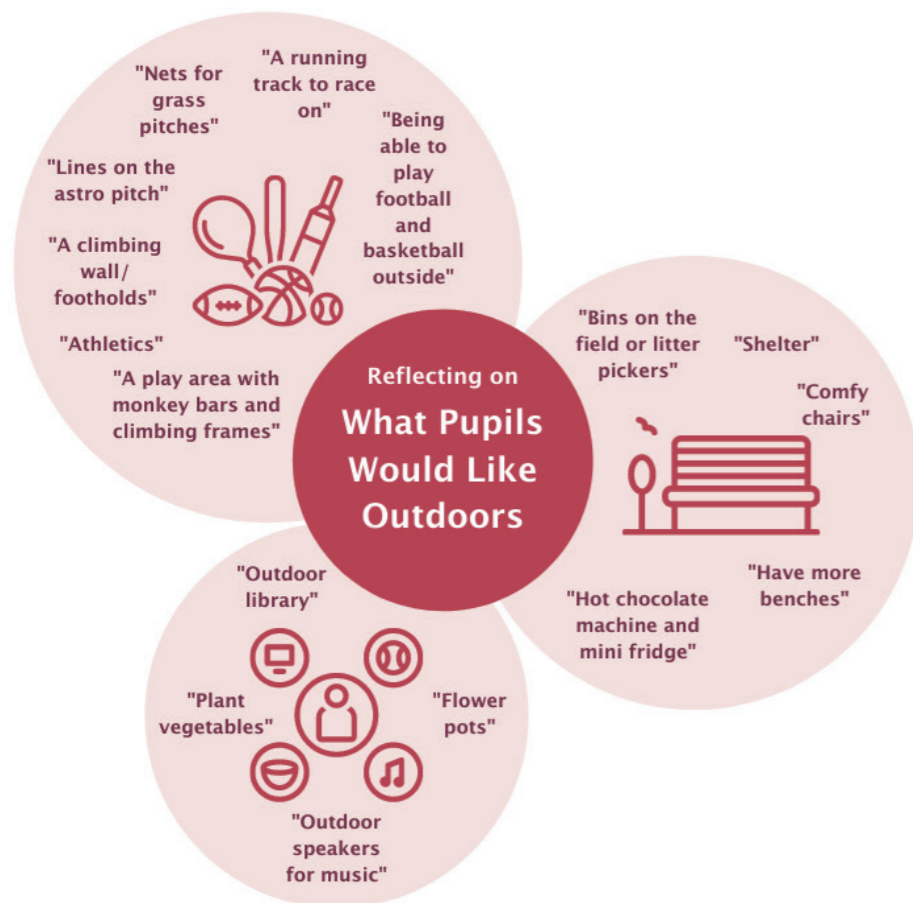
During discussions with participants, S1 focus groups explored contrasts and similarities between their Primary and Secondary play experiences. It also became evident throughout the focus groups that experiences and facilities varied between participating Secondary schools.

“There are lots of S1 pupils this year who seem much younger than previous years, much more like older Primary because they’ve missed out on so much in the last year or so.”

“Current S1s were introduced to the outdoor space as part of their transition, but without it being populated with other pupils.”

“We trialled an outdoor scavenger hunt as part of last year’s transition to High School to support a positive experience and give students the chance to see the grounds. This was successful, so may well do again this year.”





"The experience of play for pupils in Secondary school is radically different from Primary. This shouldn't be surprising as the mental, social and physical development into teenage years means different expressions of play are relevant to them. To understand adolescent play practice and benefits, we need to understand the stages of adolescent development and the driving forces behind them."

"In adolescent years the search for identity, experience and meaning leads to play behaviours that can sometimes be at odds with adult expectations. This requires us to examine what play really looks like to adolescents and accept that this may need adjustments in adult thinking. Children may need support to reacquaint themselves with the enjoyment and benefits that active, free play can bring."

'The Value of Play in 11-18 Secondary schools', Matt Robinson, 2014.

"A particular difference between Primary and Secondary schools was in the availability and quality of fixed and portable play equipment. These were widely available and in good repair in Primary schools but not in Secondary schools."

'School break and lunch times and young people's social lives: A follow-up national study', Ed Baines and Peter Blatchford, Nuffield Foundation, 2019.

Nature Connections

S1 focus group discussions about 'what would you like to do outdoors and in school grounds' largely focused on what negative aspects and what was lacking.

“Greenspace and fields are nice, but are places to avoid due to older students.”

“I don't really spend time in the woods because it's boring, and that's where the seniors hang out and smoke.”

“There's lots of space.”

“There is lots of litter.”

“It's a bit boring as it's just fields, and there's not much to do on fields.”

Graeme High School S1 Focus group: Play improvement ideas for breaktimes (Nature-based ideas highlighted in green).



Teacher observations

“The natural area is well used for sensory experience – moving through, touching, smelling, listening, hiding, watching.”

“Pupils would like to improve these spaces and add more natural structures – willow domes and tunnels.”

“We're keen to see some form of playable route made between tarmac and woodland across the grass space between the two - logs, boulders for example - that encourages students to be physical but also links to the underused woodland space.”

“Students can access woodland – and do so during class time too – but aren't encouraged at break and lunch as tends to lead to negative behaviour. There's a well-established garden area that's not used at break and lunch, only during class time.”

“Pupils like wild and un-manicured natural space... Pupils are drawn to these spaces.”

“Natural places are singularly engaging, stimulating, life-enhancing environments where children can reach new depths of understanding about themselves, their abilities and their relationship with the world around them.”

Tim Gill - Scholar and global advocate for children’s play and mobility.

“The effect of learning and play within green or natural places of all kinds... was particularly strong in generating greater engagement and challenge and enjoyment.”

‘Teaching, learning, and play in the outdoors: a survey of school and pre-school provision in Scotland’, Scottish Natural Heritage, 2015.

“Research suggests that our sense of nature connectedness tends to drop at around the age of 11 and doesn’t recover until early middle-age. While children, it seems, feel intuitively linked to the natural world, western society appears set to press this out of them as they grow older, creating atomised (and lonely) individuals... Could we reverse the teen-year decline to restore a radically enhanced sense of nature connectedness?”

‘Nature inside and out: could teaching about ‘the environment’ actually be at odds with protecting nature?’, Tom Oliver, University of Reading, 2021.

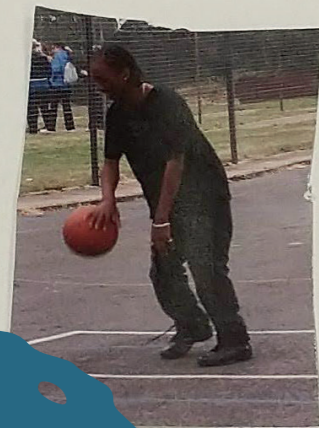
“For some adolescents, natural areas form valued places for adventure, refuge and resilience... Teens in California and Scotland communicated that they valued local nature for three reasons. They sought out places for active recreation, risk, discovery and challenge in nature. They enjoyed good times with family and friends in parks and other green gathering places. And they found retreats in nature where they could escape day-to-day stresses, relax, ‘unplug’, and be alone or with close friends.”

‘Childhood nature connection and constructive hope: A review of research on connecting with nature and coping with environmental loss’, Louise Chawla, 2020.



“Improving planting would provide colour and year-round interest in an otherwise hard, open space.”

PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

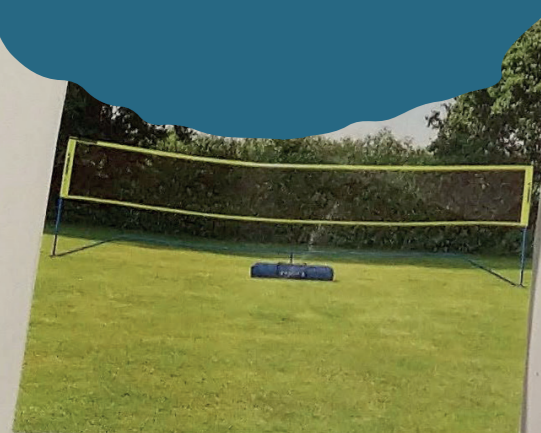


BASKETBALL



“Pupils have been involved in discussion, their voices heard, opinions asked and respected.”

Participating teacher



BADMINTON

Co-design

Co-design relies on speaking and listening to views and ideas of young people and asking them what they would like, before actively involving them in a design and creation process.

This process should be driven by their own needs and choices rather than the policies and attitudes of adults.

We worked with 60 focus groups, ran 30 workshops and consulted 281 S1 pupils

Topics covered during workshops included:

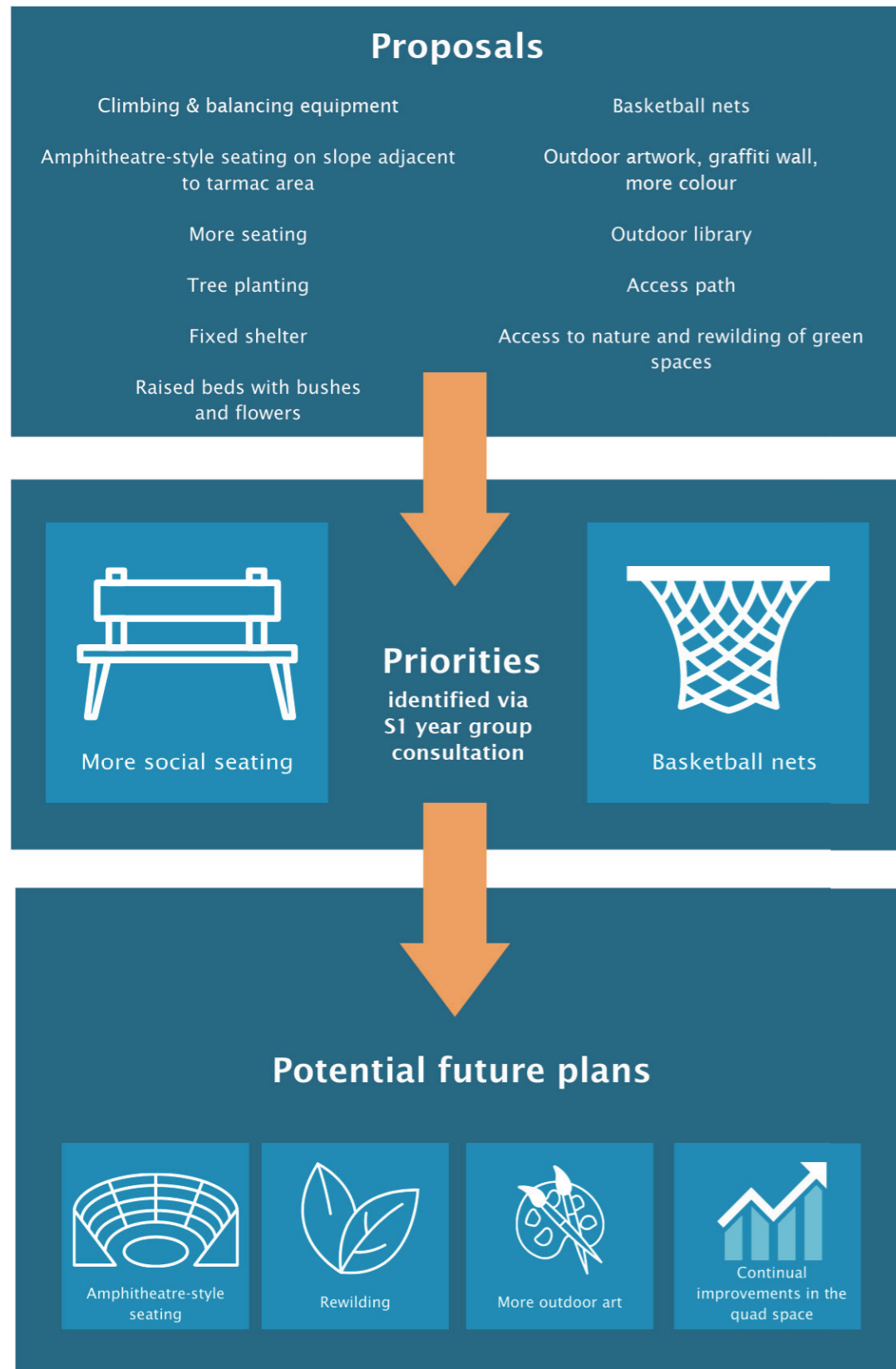
- What do S1 pupils want to do in their free time in school?
- What does play mean to S1 pupils?
- How have play experiences changed between P7 and S1, and why?
- What are the positives and negatives of current school grounds space and practice?
- What does a basic school grounds improvement plan look like?

Co-design approaches and techniques used:

- Facilitated group discussions.
- Paper-based consultation activities e.g. personal value continuums, thought clouds.
- Walk and talk discussion groups outdoors.
- Paper-based grounds improvements/design ideas to support play, displayed as a S1-wide consultation tool.
- Consolidation activities linked to consultation outcomes e.g. pupil-led decisions about the type, style and material associated with new seating.
- Suitable communication methods for pupils with Support Needs e.g. image-based.
- Pupil-led presentations to senior managers and Parent Councils to summarise consultations, outcomes and request support for next steps.

Discussions and workshops were as accessible as possible, using a variety of communication methods to ensure that children with Special Educational Needs were able to participate.

Co-design proposals from Braes High School S1 students



“Our call to action is to listen to teenagers, to what their hopes are for public space. And our call to action for teenagers: Speak up, tell us what you want and what you need. Speak even louder!”

Catherine Pease,
vPPR Architects

“Children’s play belongs to children; adults should tread lightly when considering their responsibilities in this regard, being careful not to colonise or destroy children’s own places for play through insensitive planning or the pursuit of other adult agendas, or through creating places and programmes that segregate children and their play.”

Lester, S. and Russell, W. (2010) Children’s right to play: An examination of the importance of play in the lives of children worldwide.



“Create opportunities for students to move through and amongst the seating for added interest, rather than placing seats in a line or around the periphery of the tarmac.”

Infrastructure

Suitable infrastructure – from outdoor seating to play resources – is essential for providing a successful play experience for Secondary school pupils.

Key Issues

More resources please

“Can we have a tree house?”

“Fixed basketball hoops on the wall could be better, so we can also use them after school.”

“Outdoor tables would mean we could eat lunch outdoors easily.”

“Long seating for the hill so lots of people can sit down together.”

Teacher observations

“Installing more seating in the existing quad space will allow groups of students to sit together.”

“Create opportunities for students to move through and amongst the seating for added interest, rather than placing seats in a line or around the periphery of the tarmac.”

Shelter

“We used to hang out by the container, but now we go to those two trees, ‘cause there’s more cover and less people can see.”

“I sometime sit behind the minibus parked in the quad for shelter.”

Management

“It’s bland and there’s lots of seagull poop on the picnic tables.”

“Anything permanent would need to be vandal-resistant.”

“Let students personalise the seating using maintenance-light planting and colour.”

Funding

Positive school responses to a small grant, offered as part of their involvement in Better Breaktimes, Better Transitions, showed a readiness to invest in play. The grants have been used to stimulate conversations between pupils, staff and Parent Councils. Expertise and guidance from Learning through Landscapes in identifying suitable resources to meet needs and budgets has been valued.

“To visit the average Scottish Secondary school at a break or lunch time can be an enlightening experience. ‘Playgrounds’ are often of the bleak tarmac variety. They feature large open spaces with wind whistling through, with a few seats scattered around, laid out to look good on an architect’s plan or to save some budget at the end of a build. In many, the choice of being outside is rejected, and legions sit on stairs indoors, interacting with others via social media.”

‘The Value of Play in 11–18 Secondary Schools’, Matt Robinson, 2014.

“Secondary schools were positive about the availability and quality of their basic provision but were more negative about the existence and quality of playground markings, sheltered and quiet areas on the playground.”

‘School break and lunch times and young people’s social lives: A follow-up national study’, Ed Baines and Peter Blatchford, Nuffield Foundation, 2019.





“We’re not allowed on the astro pitch at lunchtime but I wish we were.”

Participating pupil

Play vs Policing

“I think we need to consider staff attitudes – ‘play vs policing’. We need to change our school grounds culture and ethos.”

Education officer

Teacher perspectives

“Learning through play approaches are being adopted and teachers are working hard to have a more playful approach.”

“After ‘really interesting’ Twilight Training, teachers and Support for Learning Assistants reported feeling motivated to make changes, to revisit school paperwork and policies relating to play, and to support a more ‘self-directed’, ‘intrinsically motivated’, ‘freely chosen’ break time. It helped understanding about what play looks like and the adult role in the play setting.”

“There were a few issues with transition last year – S1 fights and behaviour issues in the grounds – and students needed more focus. Now S1-S3 pupils have access to the Astro every day for football and a member of staff supervises. It’s become known as the ‘big game’. Very popular – one ball – lots of other students hang around and watch. It’s led to a reduction in behaviour issues at lunchtime.”

“The culture of play and support for physical activity opportunities at breaktimes is fundamental. Changes in attitudes of staff can help pupils put aside their concerns of body image, self-esteem and peer pressure and become more active (Hyndman, 2012).”

“The affordance of play is limited by the many rules, and by social codes of peers. Engagement can be lacking, boredom is prevalent.”

“How to ensure that the play experienced by children is not driven by the policies and attitudes of adults, but by the needs and choices of children?”

‘The Value of Play in 11-18 Secondary Schools’, Matt Robinson, 2014.

“Pupils, consistent with school staff, identified the poor behaviour of some other pupils as the main challenge of breaktime. This was coupled with the absence of things to do, the banning of fun activities and, particularly amongst Secondary pupils, having sufficient time to eat. Concerns about the banning of fun activities and sufficient time to eat have increased since 2006.”

‘School break and lunch times and young people’s social lives: A follow-up national study’, Ed Baines and Peter Blatchford, Nuffield Foundation, 2019.

“Learning through play approaches are being adopted and teachers are working hard to have a more playful approach.”





“It’s about leadership – key staff need to be invested in change, with back-up from school.”

Education officer

Policy and Practice for Secondary school play

“Investing in play is one of the most important things we can do to improve children’s health and wellbeing in Scotland.”

Scotland’s Former Chief Medical Officer Professor, Sir Harry Burns..

Key Issues

Teachers, Time, Resources

Of the six schools involved in Better Breaktimes, Better Transitions, none had current policies relating to outdoor play opportunities and the value of place – and never have had.

“We can see the grounds could be better, but it’s a lack of time and resources.”

“Obstacles to better play are time constraints, lack of opportunities to focus on change.”

“School has the space and the interested staff, but lack of time and lack of funding is a big issue.”

“Lack of time, busy staff, busy timetable and delays following communication with the management company.”

COVID-19

“A consultation about the outdoor space has already taken place with students across school, but progress has been on hold due to the pandemic.”

“Lunch time has been reduced from 45 to 30 minutes. We’re not sure if or when it will change back.”

School plans, school grounds

“School is open to ideas regarding enhanced use of peripheral greenspace.”

“School policy and risk assessments are being reviewed and adapted, to allow more playful experiences.”

“The ‘Learning through Play’ lead is included in the school Improvement Plan. It’s proposed to involve staff in gathering ideas regarding play and how play can support curriculum, sharing, interacting, creativity both indoors and outdoors.”

“Positive relationships with the management company and Falkirk Council have supported school with potential grounds ideas in the past.”

“School has introduced a Pupil Entitlement Period (PEP) from 9-10am every Thursday. This provides a chance to share info with students and for students to discuss themes during open sessions. Currently none of these sessions involves outdoor activities.”

Play is the Way in Falkirk

“Play is the Way’ is a Falkirk Council education commitment. We’re keen to ensure that this is ‘Play is ALL the Way’, for learners aged 3-18, and not just in Early Years. Better Breaktimes, Better Transitions is another step towards realising our ambition that children and young people in Falkirk have play and experiential learning opportunities throughout their education.”

Education Lead, Falkirk Council



Play is the Way’s Outdoor Learning Strategy is subtitled ‘A responsibility of all’ and includes the commitment:

“All of our learners have access to stimulating and challenging outdoor spaces to play and learn”.

School grounds are recognised as an essential component in regular and progressive learning experiences:

“We need to ensure that these spaces are as natural, stimulating, diverse and exciting as possible, offering opportunities for curriculum-based outdoor learning and creative play.”

Falkirk Local Authority expectations include all establishments working towards spaces that:

- allow all learners to connect with nature on a daily basis
- provide opportunities for creative, self directed play
- have seating and shelter
- provide a choice
- use a variety of materials to provide a range of textures
- provide elements of risk and challenge

“There is little agreement about the value and function of break times amongst school staff and policy makers, and they are often taken for granted...For pupils, however, breaktimes are some of the most valued times and experiences they have in school.”

‘School break and lunch times and young people’s social lives: A follow-up national study’, Ed Baines and Peter Blatchford, Nuffield Foundation, 2019.

“We need to help some children and parents to understand that free time away from adults, engaging with nature, experimenting with social play and undertaking physical activity are things to embrace, and that they will lead better lives as a result.”

‘The Value of Play in 11-18 Secondary Schools’, Matt Robinson, 2014.

Secondary school pupils have a Right to Play

The right to play is embedded in policy, supporting the aspiration that Scotland is the best place to grow up.

Policy

The fundamental right to play is embedded in Article 31 of the [United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#). It's a vital dimension of the pleasure of childhood and youth, as well as an essential component of physical, social, cognitive, emotional and spiritual development – and doesn't stop as students leave Primary school.

The [National Play Strategy for Scotland](#) (Scottish Government, 2013) recognises play as essential to healthy development from birth to adulthood. *"All children and young people enjoy high quality play opportunities, particularly outdoor free play in stimulating spaces with access to nature, on a daily basis in early learning and childcare, nursery and school."*

The accompanying [Play Strategy Action Plan for Scotland](#) states *"Work with Local Authorities to achieve high quality school grounds in new build schools, so that schools have well designed, inclusive, and where possible community accessible play spaces, green spaces and gardens."*

The [Progress Review of Scotland's Play Strategy 2021: Play in a COVID context](#) re-affirms themes explored in Better Breaktimes, Better Transitions:

- Renew and develop the national and local commitment to outdoor play.
- Listen to children and young people and act on what they say.
- Ensure the inclusion of all children and young people.
- Ensure cross sectoral and inter professional approaches to play are in place.
- Maintain a focus on playful learning and play in schools.

['Learning for Sustainability'](#) is a key Education Scotland policy driver, an entitlement for all learners aged 3–18 within Curriculum for Excellence. *"An effective whole school and community approach to Learning for Sustainability weaves together global citizenship, sustainable development education and outdoor learning [including play] to create coherent, rewarding and transformative learning experiences."*

Learning for Sustainability is embedded within the [General Teaching Council of Scotland Professional Standards](#) for practitioners, and permeates ['How Good Is Our School? \(4\)'](#) and ['Getting It Right For Every Child'](#) policies. *"All school buildings, grounds and policies should support Learning for Sustainability" and "Staff work collaboratively to strengthen their understanding and implementation of key national policies including [...] Learning for Sustainability."*

Influences

[The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\) 'Education at a glance 2018' report.](#)

"Breaks in instruction allow pupils to play, rest and freely interact with their peers to further develop cognitive, emotional and social skills. Research suggests that students may then apply those skills in the classroom, thus improving their learning."

[Preventing Overweight and Obesity in Scotland: A Routemap Towards Healthy Weight Action Plan:](#) section 2.18.

Everyone should be *"Working together to find realistic ways of maximising physical activity within the school environment."*

[National Institute for Health and Care Excellence \(NICE\) – Physical activity and the environment \(2018\)](#)

"Providing non-traditional play materials in school playgrounds, accompanied by managing adults' perceived risk of free play, appears to increase physical activity during-break times."

The [Good School Playground Guide](#) by Learning through Landscapes *"Regular access to quality natural spaces can help address some of the most pressing challenges facing children today."*

[Children's Play Policy Forum, 2019](#)

Children need time, permission and space to play. They need opportunities to experience risk and develop resilience through play. Play is a powerful builder of happy, healthy, capable children. In short, play builds children.

[The Playful Schools Project](#) by Play Scotland, with participants up to age 14, demonstrated that outdoor, free play is crucial to children's mental health and wellbeing. The project majored on open ended 'loose parts play' and demonstrated this approach supported children to achieve developmental milestones.



Learning through Landscapes

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