

“Childhood is filled with natural wonder and curiosity. The learning environment must reflect a classroom and outdoor space that inspires a sense of wanting to investigate, to find out and explore.”

KATHY WALKER



Broomwood Primary School

Three Year Development Plan
for Outdoor Learning



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Broomwood Primary School is already doing so much right in terms of outdoor provision.

There is an experienced Forest School Lead who is outside three full days a week, and the grounds are large, with a dedicated “Eco area”.



Current situation

Broomwood 's external areas are mixed in terms of what they can offer children.

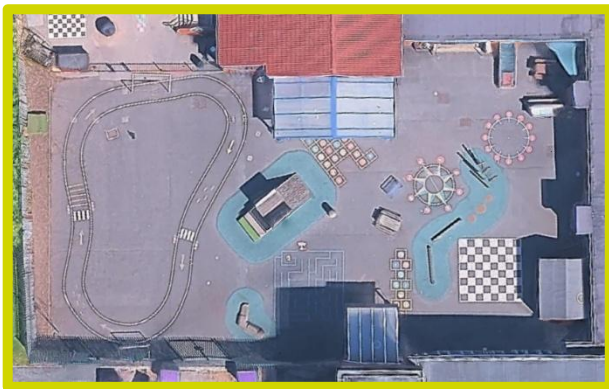
The Eco Area is very well equipped, with an amazing, covered classroom area, storage and plenty of free space and features for children to manage their own learning and exploration. Likewise, the Early Years area is excellent, with a good amount of greenspace.

However, the KS1 playground in contrast is lacking any planting, being laid entirely to tarmac, with little to no shade on a sunny day. That being said, this is only relevant for playtimes, as currently all KS1 children have access to Forest School sessions one half day a week for a term.

There is also another covered area for KS1 where there is evidence of a little planting happening in pots, although this doesn't look like there is time to maintain these efforts very well.

KS2 have a large playground which, in itself is not very inspiring but is fine for sports, however this is then surrounded by greenspace in the form of the Imagination Garden and the school field.

There have clearly been concerted efforts and funding invested in the former, with lovely features such as a Hobbit house with garden, willow arch, wooden "Books Bench" and other nice nods to literacy and reading.



This garden has recently had a new feature with bench seating and sensory planting behind. With seating on both sides this is not ideal for bringing a whole class out, but is still a nice place for children to sit with friends at lunch and playtime.

The field itself has at some point had small trees (presumably the free trees from the Woodland Trust) planted along the right-hand side and the rear. These were planted quite close together but have not been pruned as a hedge. As they grow

larger they may compete with each other for space and nutrients, but for now offer good coverage of the neighbouring houses and are mixed species which is all good for wildlife.

Broomwood has cleverly used its outdoor environment to engage with the local community, by way of offering Forest School sessions for Toddlers locally, some specifically with Dads as they are more likely to engage outside. This, combined with baby sensory sessions means that transition into Early Years is much smoother, as many parents have already been to school and feel comfortable and supported.

Likewise, school has links with the local garden centre, where the children visit regularly, and many off site trips occur regularly.

Head Teacher's Vision

The Headteacher is very aware of the benefits of Outdoor Learning, both in terms of academic value and health and wellbeing and has a clear vision to incorporate more in the coming years.

Outdoor Learning has been on the SIP for a few years, and is used extensively and successfully to uphold the schools' approach of relational inclusion with some of the most dysregulated children. The Headteacher knows how well it can help to develop strong, supportive relationships, and lends itself perfectly to embedding a sense of belonging and emotional wellbeing.

However, currently the programme is largely for younger children and those most in need and is mainly in the form of therapeutic Forest School type activities. The Headteacher accepts that integrating it regularly for KS2 children is more difficult.

She knows that the next step is to move to teaching the curriculum outdoors, but staff will definitely need training. Despite them being very positive to change, this will have to be a phased approach, initially selecting passionate, key members of staff to communicate what they have learnt across all the groups, changing mental models of teachers so that it's on their mind when planning, and giving them a toolbox to be armed to use when necessary. As relational inclusion underpins everything, staff will need to analyse their class and understand what they need – for some a lesson would be fine outside, but for others not. Having a climate sustainability strand to everything would help embed it in the right way.



The local area is one of high deprivation, with 38% of children on Pupil Premium. Most children don't play out or get the chance to enjoy the outdoor environment when not at school. Many live in flats with no gardens, or with parents who themselves haven't experienced the outdoors well enough to epitomize the benefits of spending time outside. Lots of children have complex needs due to trauma and certain life experiences, and as such need nurture and experiential learning.

The Headteacher believes wholeheartedly that allowing children more time outdoors for teaching and play underpins the practice of supporting their personal development, providing a safe and nurturing environment, and enabling staff to develop meaningful relationships which improve the ability to learn.

She is also incredibly passionate that Broomwood is viewed very much as an open facing hub for the whole community, and that the school building and grounds should be available to all to empower the community. In September a special unit, the SSC will be opened in school for 10 children from the Local Authority with SEMH, and Outdoor Learning will form a large part of their curriculum.

Another hope for the future would be to host more regular cooking sessions for parents – in this area of high deprivation many parents don't make good choices and have little experience cooking with fresh produce – better still if school could grow some of this to cook with to teach them about seasonal food or sell it to the parents.



Pre-covid, there were promising discussions with the Local Authority with regards using Broom Wood which borders school on a regular basis for the children and the community for a peppercorn rent. It was felt this could be an amazing resource for school, other local schools, the community and for Trafford as a whole, and could work particularly well for SEND children. This is something that could be taken up again.

Improving the outdoor environment for sensory needs is something that needs consideration. The new SSC will have their own outdoor area which needs to provide appropriate sensory features and plants, but also there is a desire for creating separate sensory gardens for children who crave quiet, peaceful places away from the footballs and noise of playtimes. Some love to play with mud, so a “grown up” mud kitchen would be great, whilst others would benefit from more sights, sounds and smells.

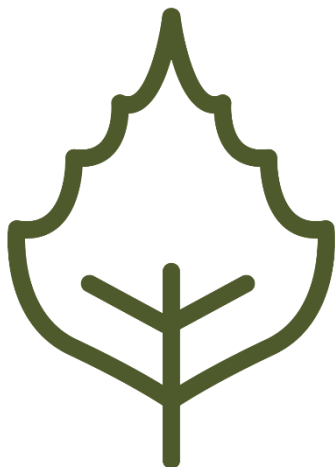


Teachers' comments

Teachers were incredibly positive about appreciating the benefits of Outdoor Learning.

They also report that their children love to be outside; that you could almost hear them give a sigh of relief as they step beyond the four walls of the classroom. However, it was mentioned more than once that more time is needed in order to plan to take the children outside the classroom.

A Year 1 teacher said that Outdoor Learning currently takes place weekly for science and sometimes maths, but it is topic dependent. They also like to take books outside in nice weather. In addition, geography has been held outside for lessons on Points of a compass and sketching maps. Teachers remembered doing fun things in the past such as a Pumpkin Festival outside, and a similar celebration outdoors at Christmas.



It was reported that all teachers try to plan for some outside time, and share ideas, although it's worth noting that only teachers from EYFS, Year 1 and year 3 were interviewed.

In terms of confidence, the teachers interviewed feel good about using the outdoors in lesson time and managing behaviour – “The Eco area is great and it's easy to look around and explore”. However, there is a desire to do more, to focus on more opportunities.

KS2 Teachers have had some training on Active Maths, but “it gets lost” – they felt another push would be helpful to remind them. “It largely doesn't happen because of time; it would be good to have time to plan.” Similarly with the White Rose maths scheme and Kapow science – they would like time to investigate ways these could be taught outdoors.

They said a bank of resources would be good, which echoes the “toolbox” idea from the H.T.

Teachers said that skills and subjects that could be taught better in the outdoors included gross motor, fine motor and handling equipment through gardening. They also agreed that appreciation and respect for nature was really important.

When asked what areas of the school grounds or nearby natural spaces could be better used for outdoor learning, staff mentioned that Broom Wood would be amazing to have access to, and they would like to be able to use the pond more regularly, but were unsure how accessible this will be in future.

Teachers thought that teamwork is great outside, with relationships and sharing all enhanced by more real-life learning. Creativity is more open ended with the extra space that is allowed. Life skills, such as riding a bike and developing patience are such important aspects that can easily be demonstrated in the outdoor environment. “Children are desperate to learn when they see something, like tadpoles or deciduous and evergreen trees. It's just more engaging.”

In terms of any additional resources (e.g., training, equipment, lesson plans) that would help them feel more confident delivering outdoor lessons, they mentioned that literacy ideas would be helpful, as they follow pathways which are quite prescriptive, and likewise literacy for EYFS. One teacher requested a natural garden with pebbles, shells, sticks and other loose parts to be used for maths; “stuff in tubs so you don’t have to find enough of everything. Also, a Weather station which would be good for everyone.”



Teachers are happy to get parents involved and mentioned that new parents are really impressed by the Outdoor Learning that currently takes place at school. They also mentioned that there is a need for more all-weather clothing, or for school to help contact parents to ask that children bring suitable clothing, although year 1 do have some waterproofs.

Parents' Comments

Generally all parents interviewed were very impressed with the amount of Outdoor Learning their children were doing at school.

Parents reported a big change in their children's behaviour, as well as a change in their own perceptions of the benefits of learning outside the classroom.

Parents reported that behaviour is better outside as there are not so many restrictions. “Forest School is amazing. Even year 6 engage in imaginary play.” They wondered that maybe this is because they missed out? “It’s good that they can do this. Maybe there is more opportunity at school?” Parents liked the idea of having a “grown up” version of a mud kitchen for older children and any other opportunities for them to have more active fun in the outdoors.

One lady with Harry, 4, has noticed a massive difference. She went to the Stay and Play session in Early years, and said it was really nice to experience the skills first hand that children don't realise they're being taught, outside. As a result, Harry is now spending a lot more time outside. “There has been a big change in the last 6 months – he was more of an inside child previously, and didn't enjoy going out, but he is loving it now. The routine, putting on outdoor clothing and wellies is great.”

One parent's 4 year old brings the imaginary play he has outside at school into home life, which has helped with making friends and taking risks.

A lady had come to one of the toddler sessions, and her child got to meet all the children he was going to go to school with. This worked as a great transition.

Whatever the weather, parents are happy to have dirty children. "Harry used to panic when he was muddy, but it helps that he's fine now." More resilient. One parent's 6yr old has been doing interventions outside which has really helped.

When asked if School could do more outdoors, parents mentioned that there is more Outdoor Learning in KS1, but not so much when they get into KS2. A parent with a 6-year-old was concerned that she might not have the same opportunity when she moves up. Parents wondered if maybe not enough Outdoor Learning happens higher up the school because it's not timetabled.

Parents were asked if they were OK with safety concerns when children went outdoors. They said yes, they felt the children were calm and understood, and that teachers were being safe. They have permission forms for using the eco area which they sign to say they are happy to let children climb and take risks.

When asked if they would like more parental involvement, all parents agreed, yes. Their children love showing them what they have been doing outside when they are offered the opportunity. However, a parent of a child in year 2 had not had any contact or invitations to come in.

Jay, whose children are 6 and 3 would love to help in the school garden. She has an allotment and would be happy to volunteer in school to help with passing on knowledge of growing skills etc.

Children have been talking about the Bug hotel, and thanks to more outdoor learning one parent is growing plants at home now.

We discussed Climate education. Harry (4 years old) understands recycling- he knows what needs recycling and why. Year 2 children are now very good at turning lights off at home!

In terms of nutrition, parents would like more cooking opportunities. They felt if school could grow more food, it would make parents generally more inclined to try and grow more at home.



Pupil Voice

Quite a few of the children could recount at least one lesson that had taken place outside.

They said being outdoors made them feel happy, calm, relaxed, and that it was less boring(!) “It’s good when the weather’s right, we get to see lots of nature but (we’re) learning at the same time, fun – not in the classroom, fun to sit in the shade and read.”

The group of children came up with quite a few memorable lessons outside between them –

- 👉 After School Club
- 👉 fun things like PE
- 👉 afternoons when we go outside and read class book – much better.
- 👉 Yr2 science investigation about habitats and insects.
- 👉 Yr5 made parachute and went outside to test it.
- 👉 Year 4 did maths.
- 👉 Did an experiment with a sock, filtered water with grass and mud.
- 👉 In year2/3 used materials to build things.
- 👉 In year 3 did investigation about seasons – looked at a tree, recorded some data on what happened.
- 👉 Lesson on compass points.
- 👉 Experiment on pollution – counting cars.
- 👉 Yr1 – Autumn and the trees.

However, when asked how often they got to learn in natural spaces at school, they answered “not very often, we usually learn inside because of the whiteboard.” And “Not usually, sometimes in a nature lesson, like Geography comparing it to India with the weather.”

“In some subjects, PE can be once a week, but science not very often, with the new teacher – not very much. Year 6 go outside for Forest School once a week after lunch. Year 5 not really, last time was Sept as a class on an Easter egg hunt. It’s either too hot or raining.”

When they were asked what subjects or topics they thought would be fun to learn in nature, they answers were wide ranging: “D.T., Art – use nature for art, Literacy - to take ideas from the outdoors for writing. A lot of the projects in English are about the outdoors so we could get ideas. There’s more creativity outside. More maths outside – if you play maths games then we could do it outside. Art – learning about Lowry – he was inspired by things outside, so it would be good to be like him.”



The children were asked what types of outdoor spaces would you like to learn in more? (e.g., forested areas, ponds, gardens) They responded by saying they’d like to go near the pond area, where it’s quiet and relaxing, and spend more time on the field, in nature. The Imagination Garden was popular, they said chairs are in different places, so they can be more focused, and everyone can have their own space. They wanted somewhere where there’s nice sounds – music, bees buzzing, nature sounds.

The children all demonstrated a good understanding and respect for nature when asked how they could do more to look after it at school, such as wanting to make a butterfly garden, making areas for bugs to keep predators away, planting more flowers for the bees and making birdfeeders.

But when asked, is there anything that makes learning in nature difficult, a few answered, sadly, that if you wanted to do maths, there's no whiteboard outside, and you'd need that or a PowerPoint. They also said that some children could get easily distracted, so it would be good if there were better areas outside with calming activities. "Tables to sit at and colouring books would be good, and more activities, as you can only go on the trim trail when it's your day."

Finally, we talked about whether they would like to do more learning outside at school, and if so, how much. Answers ranged from a few times a week to every day. Then someone asked if we went out every day, why would we need a classroom inside? "Could we have a classroom outside? A glasshouse with flowers? It would be great to have most of the learning outside." Then ensued a big discussion (not started by me!) with lots of ideas about where to keep pens and pencils, and that they could have mats to sit on. Most children thought this would be great 😊



The Benefits of Outdoor Learning

In an education environment focused on constant assessment, monitoring and testing, the positives gained by teaching children in a more creative, explorative way can be easily overlooked in a bid to just keep pace with statutory requirements.

However, the wealth of evidence supporting learning outside the four walls of a classroom points to levels of progress and associated benefits which far outweigh the effort involved in altering a lesson plan.

The Natural Connections Project

A study carried out from 2012 - 2016, The Natural Connections Project - the largest of its kind in England by Plymouth University, worked with 125 schools (primary, secondary and special) in the Southwest of England. Its main aim was to enable more outdoor learning in schools. Participants in the project included over 40,000 pupils, 2,500 teachers and 2,500 teaching assistants.

The findings have been presented and discussed in 17 countries and, through social media, people from across Europe and beyond are now sharing and using the evidence to help inform their work and share positive messages about the benefits of learning outdoors.

“Natural Connections has shown that it’s possible for school grounds and local greenspaces to be used daily to enhance teaching and learning right across the curriculum, and to deliver a wide range of associated benefits, including promoting children’s social and emotional skills and their engagement with learning.”

‘Making abstract concepts real’. ‘I see pupils learning things sometimes that they don’t perhaps make sense of quite so quickly indoors ... This morning with the numeracy, I know a lot of children would have really struggled with grasping the concept of perimeters, but being able to walk it out ... made a lot more sense to them’ (Teacher).

A summary of the findings included benefits for Pupils:



Enjoyment of lessons (95%)



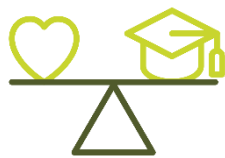
Engagement with and understanding of nature (94%)



Social skills (93%)



Engagement with learning (92%)



Health and wellbeing (92%)



Behaviour (85%)

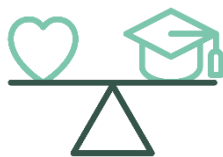


Attainment (57%)

And positive impacts for teachers:



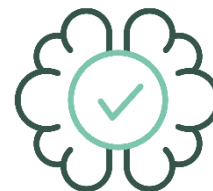
Teaching Practice (79%)



Health and wellbeing (72%)



Professional Development (69%)



Job Satisfaction (69%)

A link to the full report can be found under [Further Information](#).

Outdoor Learning is sometimes mistakenly seen as a subject or a topic to be taught in schools. On the contrary, it should be seen as a Method of Teaching.

An excerpt from “OFSTED Learning outside the classroom” report :

During a science activity in the school garden, two fascinated Year 3 pupils used a magnifying glass to explore various habitats. ‘Why does it live there?’ asked one girl, when she discovered a woodlouse under a stone. She and her partner considered various possibilities: ‘The stone protects it.’ ‘It doesn’t want the sun.’ They recorded their ideas and later compared them with other pupils’ responses. Through direct observation and experimentation, these pupils were able to arrive at sound conclusions based on evidence, fulfilling an important requirement of the National Curriculum programme of study for science.

In Scotland, since 2006 outdoor learning is required to be a “regular and progressive experience for all learners”

Far from being seen as an add on, Ofsted views learning outside the classroom as an essential element of a broad and balanced curriculum and are urging schools to make explicit reference to it in their self-evaluation and other evidence presented during the inspection visit. Demonstrating a planned and integrated approach to LOtC has never been more relevant.

The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom 2011

A word on Food Growing

The importance of Food Growing in schools cannot be underestimated. In a world where food security is now a real threat, and children more than ever fall prey to the advertisements and addiction of Sugar pushing corporations, educating children on what constitutes a healthy diet is more crucial than ever before. The health of our planet as well as the health and well-being of our children relies on food education, and where better to start than in school.

For children to be able to grow even a simple strawberry, pea or carrot, and to taste it straight from the plant can trigger a lifetime love of growing, and fascination with fresh, healthy food. Not to mention the evidence we now have around how food affects concentration, mood and even brain structure.

Food Growing in School Taskforce 2012

This taskforce was set up in response to increasing concerns about the health and well-being of children and young people.

From the report there is evidence that Food Growing in Schools:

- 🍷 Encourages and facilitates learning, particularly science learning.
- 🍷 Builds skills, including life, enterprise and employment- related, and horticultural skills.
- 🍷 Improves awareness and understanding of the natural environment and its importance to us.
- 🍷 Promotes health and well-being, particularly in relation to diet and nutrition.
- 🍷 Supports school improvement and development.
- 🍷 Strengthens communities and school-community interaction.

“The garden has added significant value in terms of learning, physical hands-on activities and building stronger links with the community. It has been a superb resource for supporting children that demonstrate challenging behaviour. Growing fruit and vegetables has had a significant impact on the children’s understanding of where food originates. Children enjoy nurturing and harvesting their produce as well as selling it to parents and cooking it within school. The gardening clubs, which involve parents and carers after school, bring the community together and parents find it supportive because they are able to support their child’s learning.”

Tim Baker, Headteacher, Charlton Manor Primary School

“Teachers have used the growing area to investigate plants and living creatures, and it has enabled deeper discussions about beneficial plants and insects, eliciting enquiry and predictive skills.”

St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School, Buckinghamshire

Curriculum links for food growing

To expect teachers to become expert food growers is unrealistic, and a barrier to most. However, training in simple and quick growing ideas which link directly to the National Curriculum will not only bring the curriculum to life (literally), but also produce something tangible for children to eat, teach children a transferable life skill to try at home with parents, offer a wider understanding of where their food comes from and spark conversations and critical thinking around the science, geography and history of food growing, not to mention cross curricular links to maths and literacy.

An example:

Growing Garlic cloves, onion sets or broad beans outside in autumn (very easy to grow in pots, beds or containers, high success rates) –

Science –

- 🍷 Year 2, “observe and describe how seeds and bulbs grow into mature plants”, “find out and describe how plants need water, light and a suitable temperature to grow and stay healthy”,
- 🍷 Year 3, “identify and describe the functions of different parts of flowering plants: roots, stem/trunk, leaves and flowers”, “explore the requirements of plants for life and growth (air, light, water, nutrients from soil, and room to grow) and how they vary from plant to plant”.

Maths –

- 🍷 EYFS – Counting seeds, sorting seeds,
- 🍷 Multiple years - Times Tables (growing in a grid or module tray) Seed packet information – Roman numerals, measuring, using rulers, estimating,
- 🍷 years 4 and 5 Percentages (of successful growth), area, volume and perimeter (of growing area)

Literacy –

- 🍷 Seed packet information – interpreting instructions, writing labels, researching and writing recipes for produce

Geography –

- 🍷 Research if not native, where plants come from, location, place, land use, physical geography for soils and farming, weather

History –

- 🍷 Research historical uses of the plant, it's value, medicinal use, how it was brought to the UK by plant hunters.

DT –

- 🍷 building a growing area, considering materials, cost of materials, planning, building, maintaining, harvesting, selling produce, advertising

Art –

- 🍷 Designing signs, sketching flower parts, making posters to advertise sales of produce

These links are by no way exhaustive, there are many more that could be made depending on the Core or Foundation topics being studied.



Proposed Development of the Grounds

These proposals are made on the basis of transforming the outdoor space with a minimal amount of money and using mostly plants, recyclables and cheap or free labour, rather than hard landscaping, which is both expensive and not very natural.

In this way the children, staff and other volunteers can be fully involved without having to employ costly landscapers, unless absolutely necessary.

Front Entrance

The main entrance to a school is so important for the whole school community, to give pride and respect for teachers and students, and to impress on parents and other visitors that the care nurture they are greeted with is a reflection of the care and nurture for the children. Admittedly, sometimes safeguarding and protective measures must be taken, but that doesn't prevent the school frontage from being attractive.

Given the passion of the SLT to build on their excellent work to make school an integral part of the Community, it makes a lot of sense to instigate a Community Garden in the grounds.

This would have so many benefits, not least:

- Cement links with parents and the local community by offering a communal, safe place to grow food and somewhere to relax and socialise.
- Send a message to the local community that school cares about their wellbeing and health and is willing to offer a space to facilitate that.
- Offer a positive link to parents for engaging with school, leading to school being seen as a caring hub for the community and open facing to all.
- Create a sustainable food growing network of people willing to share produce, skills and knowledge in a multi-generational setting, which in time could generate volunteers to help maintain school areas and work with children.
- Grow food which can be used in cookery classes and to promote healthier choices for parents and children.
- Give children pride in their school and pride and connection to their parents through gardening, firmly placing Broomwood Primary school as a centre point in the community for all families.
- Attract a lot more funding for school, as a lot of grants are available where there are clear project links to Community.



Often the issue of opening schools up to the general public is, of course, safeguarding. However, there are a few areas of lawn and trees which exist just inside the main gates to the Car Park, which means although they have access to the school grounds, they will not have access inside school itself or areas where the children play.

This would be an ideal area to start a proper Community Garden, where a variety of raised beds could be dug with children and parents to grow edible produce and flowers.

The existing trees near the main entrance could provide an area for seating in the shade, and the area benefits from front gates which could be closed and locked to give protection against vandalism. Although the aspect is North facing for two of the three grassed areas, the hedges are low enough to offer sunshine for most of the year – plenty of light and warmth to grow a huge variety of plants. Access to water for the plants can be achieved by setting up water butts to run off the gutters of the surrounding buildings.



There are fences adjacent to the Year 1 playgrounds to grow climbers up – these could be attractive flowers in the Spring / Summer, but also runner beans, thornless blackberries, raspberries and even espaliered fruit trees.



Early Years Playground

Early Years has a wonderful play area, which has been thoughtfully designed across both all-weather tarmac and a plentiful green area.

Children play freely between the two, and there is evidence of wellies for more inclement weather to allow for continuous provision all year round.



It would be nice to see more planting in containers on the tarmacked area to soften the grey, and to add a little interest and biodiversity. Depending on the plants chosen, this could offer an evergreen “jungle like” feel to a corner or wall, (and offer some well needed shade), or if adding trellis, runner beans or flowering climbers could be planted. Grasses would offer sensory sounds, or low-level planters could be filled with Spring bulbs followed by edible salads and strawberries.

The grassy area for Early Years has many exciting features, and seems to be zoned somewhat. One observation would be to get the raised beds refilled with good compost and start growing fun, easy things with the children such as peas, carrots and onions and garlic. If this is an area where they like to dig, maybe offer them an alternative digging area near the construction zone, and keep the raised beds for food growing. Potatoes could also be grown easily in bags (more fun to harvest – turning them out onto a tarp) and it would be nice to have pots with herbs, or a herb bed for the sensory smells and tastes – mint, rosemary, sage are all perennial herbs which will remain year on year.



Fruit trees are cheap to buy and easy to maintain, and over the years will offer easy, healthy snacks for the children. If these are grown near to the raise beds, a “mini orchard” could be established. Choose a dwarf rootstock (a tree which will stay small anyway), and then you can gently weigh down the branches as they grow by tying filled bottles of water, which will mean there will laterally be lower hanging fruit for the children to be able to pick themselves!

It might also be nice in the shade to build a larger bug hotel with children made of pallets, and move the signs on the fence nearer to it, with some larger logs and branches for finding mini beasts.

Year 1 Playground

This playground has a few nice features such as bike track and fort, but as mentioned previously is completely devoid of anything living and green. It also seems a big shame for children to have had such a natural environment in Reception, only to come to a hot, concrete area in year 1. But there are solutions.

It would be a huge expense to break up areas of the tarmac using any kind of permanent structure, and would also limit the use of the wider playground as a whole if needed. Instead, a flexible approach can still give great results, and actually make things more exciting for the children.

Areas could be divided or zoned for teaching and play using a range of planters. A good idea with these is to buy, or have them constructed with lockable castors on the base, so that they can easily be moved around to change the layout of the playground; a few together can make a wall, to keep things interesting for different types of play.



They can be planted with trees, shrubs or even edibles, but grasses and bamboo can give instant screening to divide areas.

The walls could be impenetrable, or interspersed with bridges, ramps, tunnels, arches, gates etc to give more “playful” boundaries, which offer lots of physical and problem-solving skills to navigate through, under or over. They could even be placed alongside the existing structures like the fort or balance beam.

The beauty of this approach is that, as long as all of the elements are either light enough to be moved or mobile with wheels, then the possibilities are endless, and the children themselves could even be challenged to design their own play spaces.

The type of plants in the containers will also contribute hugely to the resulting “feel” of the areas – swathes of tall ornamental grasses mixed



with small flowers can give a very sensory and relaxing feel, like the sounds of the ocean, whereas thick bamboo and ferns will feel very jungle-like and exciting. Trellises in planters growing beans and other edibles will literally offer a moveable feast! A note here – unless the planters are against the boundary fence or a wall, the height of thick evergreen planting should not exceed 1m to prevent the wind blowing it over – ideally a planter with a height of 40-50cm would be ideal. Grasses can be a little higher as the wind blows through these.



The boundaries could also be partly made up of small branches between the planters or other features, big enough to stay put, but light enough so that two children could move them independently. Again, if children are involved in designing the play spaces, they are more likely to stay within the spaces. Even mobile water walls on castors can be used to make the boundary “walls” more interesting.



As well as using planters for boundaries, larger planters could just be used to make the area more natural and interesting – fruit trees in their own planters to create interest and shade (large square planters are more stable in wind)

Other ideas for non-permanent zones within the playground could include:

Stage – mobile and moveable seating

Fix hooks to the fence or wall. Allow for interchangeable backdrops to be used for children’s performances. They could paint these themselves on old sheets as part of art creative time. Give them a theme, maybe just give them certain colours – nature colours, bright disco colours, peaceful ocean colours etc. Give them inspiration about theatre set design etc.



The stage itself can be modular and made from pallets which can be lifted or added to if needed to create more space.

“Seats” can be these artificial grass covered storage boxes, (there are already some in other areas of school) and / or cushions, throws, log sections or homemade seat pads.

Make them small enough to carry, fit handles on two sides for children to move in pairs. These could also be used as part of the playful boundaries mentioned above.



Mobile Den Building Area

If Karibiner hooks are fixed to the fence or wall at child height, then children can attach tarps and use sticks in logs as pictured to hold up the 3rd corner. In a nearby store keep tarps and string. Alternatively, as in the picture, free standing tents could be built.



Camo tarps could be hung on the fence to create a secluded forest feel when making dens.



As with the EYFS playground, by planting containers with large bamboo or willow against the southerly boundary (with the main entrance), you could very quickly establish some shade and make the area feel greener and cooler, without risking plants like bamboo spreading.

Other Ideas :

Pop up wigwams or self-made ones from canes and a sheet are perfect for a space which may have multiple uses. Adding in a mat or some artificial grass or cushions inside can provide needed shade on a hot day.

Children can be involved in the construction from the outset.



A wooden structure sited on the playground, such as the one pictured painted in blackboard paint, can be a continually changing “shop”, café or house, depending on the creativity of the children and what you theme you are learning about.

This offers lots of opportunities for real life learning such as money maths, communication skills, not to mention fine and gross motor skills.

Artificial grass offcuts



To encourage more child led play – these can be used by the children to re-design the playground area – to make paths to and from dens, houses, shops (as above) or imaginary gardens or play areas.

Broomwood has a bike track to one side of the main playground. Grass offcuts could be used within this to create “parks” or areas for play, which again can be changed and adapted as the children see fit.

They can be cheaply or freely obtained, and are heavy enough to stay put where they are left but easy enough to be dragged around by a few children. Curved pieces could be supplied with straight pieces for an interesting “set”.

Staff may need to build one first to demonstrate how it would work, and then either let children design and build their own or follow a simple pattern designed by staff, to build a different “town” area or “mini Broomwood village”.



Smaller pieces could easily be layed out for shape games if cut accordingly, or for repeating pattern making and other maths challenges.



If you were to introduce a Garage building – a shed like this one perhaps where “repairs” can be carried out on trikes, then more children who are waiting a turn could still be involved in active real-life play.

Any old wellies, or even milk bottles can be attached to the fences and used to plant cheap bedding plants in the summer, or strawberries.

Softening the fences by threading bright coloured materials, attaching number signs, or attaching children’s art printed on waterproof cheap foamboard signs can all help to change the feel of the area, brighten it and make it more fun.

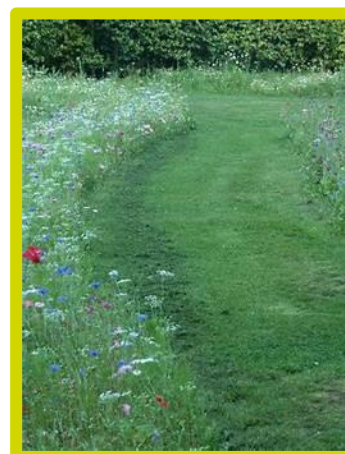


Eco Area

This is a very natural and much-loved area, but with a little TLC and a re-think could be so much more. It appears a lot of the planting, particularly the fruit bushes which run en masse behind the raised beds, are quite old and overgrown and don’t offer much in terms of produce or play.

Most importantly here, the entire area needs more clearly zoning, and the different play opportunities clearly marked and understood for the benefits of staff and children if it is to be used for the wide school community for learning and exploration.

In order to zone the respective areas off, erecting fencing would be both very costly and very uninspiring. A better option immediately would be to allow the grass to grow in certain strips, to immediately create “soft” wildflower boundaries, whilst at the same time providing a haven for wildlife, much more biodiversity and lovely, pretty surroundings for the children.



As with the idea of “playful” boundaries in the Year 1 playground, creating zones by using more plants can work equally well to help zone areas in this grassy section of school.

These boundaries could be made more robust with the planting of free trees from the Woodland Trust (with clear taping off to make sure grounds maintenance don’t mow them down), and/or post and wire fences put up with the intention of growing a variety of bush fruit along them such as raspberries, thornless blackberries, tayberries etc – an edible hedge.

This is fairly quick and inexpensive to establish, and with a little education the children under the watchful eye of the Forest School lead, could be tasked with clearing weeds and watering the fruit bushes, which will eventually yield an amazing amount for the whole school to enjoy and even possible sell.

Another solution would be to plant borders of ornamental grasses, shrubs and mixed perennials and herbaceous plants that are all low maintenance.

Bridges can work well to connect zones, with a sea of grasses under them like a river to cross.



An exciting way to delineate

areas is to plant a “Fedge” – usually achieved with willow, making a more 2-dimensional living fence which the children and staff can have a hand in planting. These pretty criss-crossed willow fedges can also be punctuated with willow arches, tunnels or even more elaborate willow structures to allow hours of play and exploration. These could compliment the existing fences with willow growing

against them, which with a good prune could be tidied and possible even used to provide new willow for some of the Fedges. These are easily planted with children, giving them a sense of ownership and care.



As well as these ideas for long runs of boundaries, other fun features could be popped in between, such as easily planted Wigwams of beans, or sweet peas, or other climbers.

Wooden built boards with information on wildlife, or just with blackboard paint at child height for some mark making or even chalk drawing of flowers or wildlife can be another feature to punctuate the playful boundaries.





Recycled large tubes could be used as gateways to different zones (although children would still have the option to go through normal gates instead).



The positioning of gateways (or gates) between zones could be designed in such a

way that you create a fascinating journey, which could be used for a teddy bears picnic, or to make children feel like explorers!

A really important element will be to have clear signage for all zones, and within them other signage to help suggest ways to use them. In terms of the different zones that could be created, obvious ones are:

Growing Zone – where the raised beds are – build a large bug hotel here, plant more fruit trees / cut back shrubs around the existing fruit trees for a mini orchard and maybe a small shelter by the fence which can house tools and pots and collect water from the adjacent EYFS shelter roof into water butts. At the very least a range of herbs could be grown in the



raised beds, but Strawberries, which will multiply year on year, peas and beans are also very easy to grow. This zone could have a clearly



signed and fun arched entrance from the playground for the whole school to access, as well as being accessed from the larger Eco Area as a whole. An informal lunchtime gardening club could be started for any interested children. Signage is

key here to let everyone know what is growing – a whiteboard erected on the fence or blackboard that the children can be in charge of updating.

Main Outdoor Classroom – this already exists in the form of the fabulous Forest School covered area. If this is was timetabled or used rotationally, many exploratory lessons on plants and nature could be started from this spot. An outdoor blackboard could easily be built, and a teaching table to one side (higher with no seating to stand around and observe).

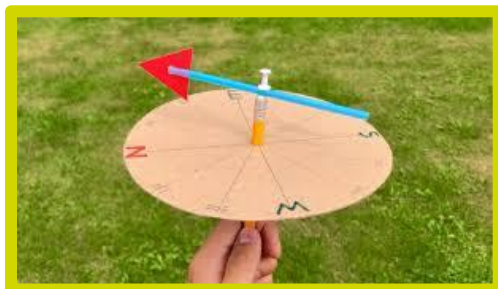


Exercise / Climbing Zone – to include the climbing tree, but could also include the natural trim trail section and be given more thought around stimulation for more active games.



Den building Zone – nearer the bushes, fallen willow and back fence, an area with plenty of sticks and branches and available tarps with carabiner hooks for children to construct their own dens.

Weather station zone – a small area could be set up with monitoring equipment (made by children) to check rainfall, wind direction and temperature, which can be easily integrated with science and maths.



Investigation Zone – to include the mud kitchen. This could also house a shed containing all the spare parts and small natural elements requested by teachers to enable more natural maths teaching.

Quiet Zone – this may need to be a newly created zone - a nice area surrounded with grasses, trees and bushes with small log seats to sit and observe nature. Sensory planting for smell, sound and touch.

Wildflower meadow - would be easy to install – cordoning off a large area of the grass and allowing it to grow long with fun pathways cut through, leading to a mown circle as a small outdoor classroom area with logs for seating. This would be a great area to observe pollinators and minibeasts, or as a story and literacy area. The grasses and wildflowers would create a habitat supporting many insects, and would provide seeds for birds after flowers are finished. If it seems there isn't enough space to do this justice within the Eco Area, this could be established in one corner of the larger field. This could also be used as a quiet area at playtimes and lunchtime.



Finally, although an amazing pond has been established at the front of school, given the children's desire to spend more time around a pond, and the learning opportunities it provides, it may be worth considering longer term establishing another one in the Eco Area, suitably fenced off but available to all. It will all depend on the access to the existing pond, given the new outside area for the SSC.

Imagination Garden

As previously mentioned, this part of the school grounds has, over the years had many fun and thought-provoking features added, particularly on the Literacy theme.

However, they seem to exist slightly in isolation, and there's no clear cohesive feel to this area, as it is a go-between from the KS2 playground to the field and the Eco Area.

If there were to be, again, some form of boundary or "zoning off" of this space, it would work much better as a destination for outdoor learning, or a designated quiet zone at playtime for those children who want to be away from the fast pace of ball games and the noise. It would also then be able to be used more regularly for the Hub children who currently only have an area of hardstanding to play on.

It seems from the lack of grass, hardened earth, and bark, that the area around the large Willow tree is a well-trodden route from the bike storage, and possibly used a lot at playtime for KS2 as it offers shade in the Summer and somewhere dry off the playground to shelter in rain.



It would then make sense to partition the large Willow tree from the rest of the imagination garden. If Willow Fedges are used and grown to five foot high, then this would provide a living boundary, which would look green and calm, and also help to cut down the noise and possibility of footballs entering the Imagination area at playtimes.

If this were to run from the small corner "fence" behind the seat of books, and up to the bike storage behind the hobbit house, then along the path edge to the corner, this would form a Westerly and Southerly border. If then another Willow fedge were planted from the other end of the small corner fence along the edge of the tarmac to the top corner of the playground with the field, this would help enormously to define the area without fencing it off completely.

There could well be gaps in this new living boundary, for instance to allow access from the covered canopy area (which can be used as another outdoor classroom) into the Imagination area. This would also allow quieter children at breaktime access to the garden.

To define this area further, and to stay true to it's name, much more imaginative planting could be added by way of

large beds of low maintenance grasses and easy-care herbaceous plants, which could in themselves create more mini zones of calm and nature. None of these would contain planting that would get too high or be too difficult to see children through, as it would all be of a light, airy nature.



Along the fence with the park, a wide mixture of low maintenance shrubs and ornamental grasses would, over time give year-round interest and provide more habitats for a wider range of creatures.



If water harvesting is set up with gutters from the tiles of the small, covered seating areas, the hobbit house, and possibly even the canopy, then if a little area of open shelving with watering cans is available to children, they could, in the hotter months ensure that all the plants are well maintained.

To spark imagination arounds potions and magic, the garden of the hobbit house could be planted with perennial herbs – Rosemary, Sage and mint, lavender etc; which would allow the children to pick and mix their own potions with a little water.



The willow “arch/dome” needs a good tidy up and cut back, and then much of the offcuts could be re- used to plant more willow structures – simple willow arches could be used to form different entrances or exits to the garden. They could also be used to make low fences to protect the planted beds from children running over them.



Sensory Garden

The other main design theme of this area could include a lot more sensory plants and structures such as solar fountains, coloured panels and maybe even a barefoot path. This sensory area could be a smaller, defined area within the imagination garden, again delineated by more feeding or planted borders.



KS2 Playground

As mentioned previously, this area is already a great size and perfect for sports and games, leading to the field and with the covered canopy for shade. Assuming all KS2 children have access to the Imagination Garden at all times, it would be pointless trying to alter the playground too much given that all of the above is also available.

However, a few touches could be made to soften the hardness of the grey tarmac and the school walls, and to continue to add small areas of biodiversity. One example would be to make vertical gardens from pallets which can be attached to the walls between the windows. These could be an excellent DT / STEM project for children in KS2, involving plenty of maths and science in determining how to make them, with what materials, costings, how to maintain, etc. Different plants could be placed on south facing walls versus North facing, and research done into which plants would prefer which. Consideration could be given to choices of edibles, or ornamentals, plants such as herbs or trailing plants. Please see the attached handout on Cross Curricular ideas.



In addition, climbers could be grown up the posts of the covered Canopy in large planters, including sunflowers and sweet peas, or perennial climbers such as roses and clematis.

Again, involving children in these choices and the planting would help make sure they are cared for properly.

Main Field

It is not known if the main field needs to be kept mown entirely for football games to outside clubs or societies. However, if this is the case, there is still usually room to establish some other planting or features in corners or along boundaries.

Mixed hedging

The existing mixed hedge which runs along two sides of the field is useful but could be interplanted with new hedging plants if it is to form a full hedge. This could be done as part of a year 3 soils lesson to involve children in the planting, using the free trees from the Woodland Trust.



Fun Features



The building of a **mud monster** can involve lots of children, great project design, and leaves a unique legacy of a fun filled, messy day! This is best done in Winter when mud is aplenty, and on a wear your own (old) clothes day 😊

He or she would also be best constructed in a shady spot, so children can be consulted on the best place to make it, possibly design their ideas first and be challenged to think about which natural materials they would use.

Again, creating **willow structures – tunnels, arches and domes** can be great fun, involve the children from the outset and provide more interesting play spaces. They can be as simple as a short archway to another zone, or a full winding tunnel with various entrances and exits.

Willow is reasonably cheap to buy for this activity, but must be planted at a certain time of year. Once established, you can harvest more willow off your tunnels to be used in a variety of ways such as low hedging, weaving activities or more tunnels!



Specimen trees are very useful, providing shade and variety of year-round colour, as well as height and structure to the landscape.

In fact, the free woodland trust trees could be used for this purpose. Otherwise buying larger trees from a wholesale provider cheaply would give a quicker option.

Single Japanese Maples can look stunning with a wide variety of bold autumn colours.

Leaving the grass to grow long and mowing paths through, or planting swathes of ornamental grasses to create sensory areas are all options that could be repeated in corners of this area.



Pond area

At the time of writing, it was not known quite how this area will be divided, and how much space will be given to the pond itself. However, the benefits and learning opportunities of this small but very important habitat cannot be underestimated. Over a few years a wonderful mature pond has been created teeming with life and interest.

Hopefully enough space will be left between the pond and the fence surrounding it for children to be able to sit within the fence and investigate the pond life, carry out some basic pond dipping, and then analyse their findings before returning the pond life to the water.



Once frogspawn hatches in February, the following months provide all sorts of curriculum links including habitats and life cycles.

If possible, within this area, some more planting with small trees and shrubs would also be beneficial to create more biodiversity and opportunities for birds, as birdfeeders already exist. The space could also be used for reading and writing inspiration.



Pre School Playground

This is a great area for smaller children, with much to explore and lots of great features. There is wonderful shade offered by the field maple, and good year-round provision given the fake grass areas and rubber bark, whilst still having a good amount of real grass (and wellies!).

Some areas are looking a bit tired – the bug hotel could do with some new furniture (!), but essentially there is not much to do here. The addition of some ornamental grasses near the fence to soften and add more biodiversity would be nice, and climbers could be grown up against the fence that will border the SSC area or pond area. These could be sunflowers that could be seen from either side of the fence.



SSC playground

Although the extent of this area is not completely clear, it will take into account the lovely shade offered by the boundary trees and hedge, and there will be areas of sloping grass to think about. There are existing pallets fixed to walls which in the past have been planted. It would be nice to utilise these again by planting them with sensory herbs and if possible, working with children to plant a “pick and mix” salad bar – different loose leaf lettuce varieties, tumbling cherry tomatoes, strawberries etc. There are many things that would be fun to grow, soften the brick walls aesthetically and also encourage the take up of healthy food.



Other features that could be introduced here include a barefoot path, (maybe the children could be instrumental in designing and building this?), and wind chimes hung in the trees (children could make these).

Another simple solar powered fountain could be installed here for gentle noise, possibly along with other water play like a water wall (one with interchangeable pieces would be great



for older children to experience hands on science) and a mud kitchen for a range of ages and abilities.

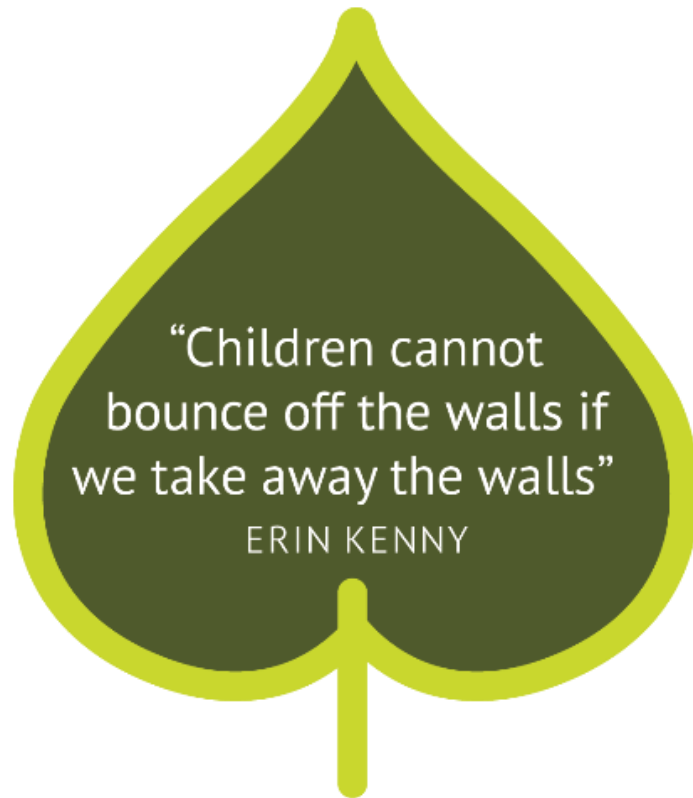


The change in levels could be tackled by digging out a simple curve for seating as pictured but retaining the soil with upright scaffold planks. A slightly bigger project would be to terrace the hill into grass seating. Both of these could have low maintenance grasses planted alongside or in between.



In general, the whole area would benefit from an exciting range of plants, to inspire, relax and offer sensory exploration. A mixture of colourful, perfumed sensory perennials and herbaceous plants filling the spaces along with some of the shrubs already there, could all be low maintenance. Any pockets of grass for mowing could be either left for wildflowers with mowed pathways.





How to Facilitate the Development

Short Term

Summer 2, 2025 :

Broom Wood – rekindle discussions with the Local Authority to find out on what basis the Community Centre use the wood (if it is indeed them using it). See if this could work for school or suggest a different basis.

If it hasn't already been done, **apply for the Woodland Trust free tree pack**, for delivery in November. These applications are expected to close in August so the sooner the better. The "Year-round Colour" pack will give you exactly that with blossom, berries and Autumnal colour. Keep 5 or so of the Hazel separate and grow on in pots, then plant out in the Forest School Area next year for coppicing lovely straight wood ideal for den building and plant supports.

It's not too late to **leave grass uncut** to allow wildflowers to grow. Push canes into the ground in the areas needing to be "rewilded" and run tape along to make it clear to staff, children and most importantly, grounds maintenance that you do not want these sections mown. (Amazon, £5.99 for 25m) After mid-June, ask them to cut pathways through that you've decided on to make fun spaces for the children in the Nature Garden area. For the Eco Garden, use the tape and canes to make the boundaries of the zones you need.



These areas of long grass can remain until mid to late September, depending on the weather, when they can be cut before Winter.

Have a staff meeting to discuss this plan, and to get everyone excited about inputting ideas and collecting natural materials, e.g. sticks and logs for den building areas. See who would be best suited to ask parents etc. for help; one has already expressed an interest from the parent discussion.

Canvas parents, grandparents, local garden centre and any other local community groups to see if they would be interested in helping set up a **Community Garden** at school, and if they have any specific skills that would be useful. You may find people or Dads through the Forest School sessions who are able and willing to make raised beds if you supply the timber.

In this vein, start to form a Broomwood Outdoor Learning and Growing Committee – see below.

The initial **Habitat Mapping exercise** required for the NENP funding will take place this term by 10th July, with Growing Outside, working with the children for the day to fully embed the need for biodiversity and how school will work with nature in future. To capitalise on this day, and findings of simple things to increase biodiversity could be planned into future sessions with the children.

It might be nice as Year 6 have finished SAT's, to get them involved in some elements of the plan, allowing them some decision making in, for instance how to pick off areas of the larger field, and maybe if wet weather is forecast, give them a muddy day to create the Mud Monster?! That would leave quite a legacy for the class of 25 😊

Some of the recommendations for the **movable "mobile" containers** as additions to the tarmac areas could be looked at, maybe discussed with the Site Manager and costings made. If these can be made on

site, then this would save considerable money and mean there is a blueprint for making more in the future as funds allow.

Get **children to write letters** to local businesses, residents and shops for materials for the Year 1 playground – offcuts of fake grass, pallets, wood for making planters etc.

Autumn 2025 :

The Autumn and Winter months are a **great time to plant shrubs and trees**, as long as the ground is not hard with frost. It allows them to get established whilst they are dormant before setting down roots and growing on in the Spring.

If Woodland Trust trees have been applied for, these can be used to **plant a mixed hedge** after November when they arrive, to fill in the gaps along the field, and to start to help zone off areas in the Eco Area. This a great activity to do with the children, and Growing Outside can facilitate this with a one-day workshop. If staff are available for any part of the day, they could also be trained in how to plant small trees properly for the future.

Depending upon budget, the **fruit bushes** for the Eco Area can be planted, again as part of a workshop with Growing Outside, along with any specimen trees along the edges of the field and elsewhere as decided.

The best time to **plant Willow** for fedges, arches, tunnels and domes is early December to late March, as the plants themselves are dormant and this is when willow providers have plenty of it, so now is a good time to order the Willow and plan the planting days.

If the **Community Garden** is underway, then this is a good term to start construction on any features such as raised beds, install water butts from downpipes, plan seating areas and plan what will be grown next year. This may be a good time for the Committee to **apply for the lottery funding** for the community garden, setting out clearly what the aims of the garden will achieve for everyone involved.

This may also be a good time to **build the barefoot walk** in the SSC playground, and the sensory garden within the Imagination Garden, and to cut back hard any shrubs around school which are in need of drastic measures.

Spring 2026 :

There is still time to **plant shrubs and trees** before the ground warms up, usually before Valentines Day.

If budget and time allows, the **willow structures could be planted now**. They must be done before the weather gets any warmer and whilst there is plenty of rain for the roots to establish and the ground is soft. The children can be involved in both the design and planting as it can provide a lot of cross curricular learning, and they will then develop a sense of ownership and care for the structures.

Willow is fairly cheap to buy but once delivered should be used straight away, so planning this project for a particular day / week is vital. Ideally the turf under the footprint of the willow should be removed and the earth dug over to loosen it prior to planting, which then makes it easier for children to push the rods straight into the ground.

Summer 2026 :

Establish planting patches of ornamental grasses and perennials wherever they are needed – Spring and early Summer is the best time to plant grasses and perennials. In some areas turf may need to be stripped (by hand or hiring a turf stripper), and then the ground forked over.

A budget will be needed for these plants, though if buying in bulk from a wholesaler a huge variety of grasses and perennial plants can be bought very cheaply in 9cm pots. Or they can be bought out of the NENP grant (depending on other planting needed).

I would suggest marking out a few areas in the Imagination Garden and other areas to be planted. This would give you some colour and interest in the first year, allow the plants to establish and then you could enlarge these areas year on year. Many of the plants you could use will self-seed, so you can transplant the seedlings to the new beds as well as leaving some to “bulk out” the existing beds.

Planted areas will need watering in well for the first few months if the weather is dry. If a water source is available with some watering cans, children are always happy to help 😊

Medium Term

Depending on what has been achieved in the first year, the timetable for year two will work largely on the same basis: planting trees and shrubs over Winter and Perennials in Spring and summer, including wildflowers.

The Committee should be looking for pots of funding to afford more raised beds for the Year 1 playground and to enhance features elsewhere. Ideally by now you have a thriving committee and volunteer base to be leading and suggesting new projects for more outdoor learning and community involvement through gardening, food growing and play.

Longer Term and beyond

“Nice to have” features such as larger planters or any new specialist equipment **may need fundraising** for before they can be developed. Planning and budgeting for these will be key in deciding when they are able to be introduced.

Perennial planting areas can continue to be added to, and wildflower meadows and Orchards monitored and maintained.

Not mentioned above, but something you may want to consider for the future would be a polytunnel in the Eco area, to facilitate more ability to grow a wider variety of food all year round.



Broomwood Outdoor Learning and Growing Committee

Regardless of starting a community garden or not, the best way to enable a planned and organized approach to development is to set up a Committee of a mixture of people, including some from the SLT, teachers, parents, Governors and members of the local community – possibly from a Church or local allotment society. The wider range of people you involve, the better the chances of continued sustainability and success.

This means you have a range of skills on offer, as well as hopefully a range of ideas on how to best manage each project. Select people based on their skills such as social media, practical skills, good links with local business, wide range of local contacts, good at admin etc. Without a committee there is usually too much pressure on one individual in school and the projects fail.

Suggest a monthly meeting or at least once every half term to plan for the years ahead.

As well as the development ideas outlined above, it's a good idea to think of ways to work with local Scouts and Brownies groups by maybe giving them access to planting areas. This outward facing approach can often work in return by being offered cheaper plants or opportunities to get involved with more local community initiatives.

Setting up a weekly gardening club is also a factor for success as this ensures the seasonal tasks will get done. At the very least plants will be watered and weeded, and if effective, the group can ensure a variety of food is grown. You may wish to try and enlist help from a keen parent or local allotment holder who would be happy to pass on their knowledge to the next generation.

The children involved in this group regularly could be given special status at school and could possibly go on to teach and mentor younger children.

If you start to grow good amounts of food (and remember you can grow in any container, not just the raised beds) then you could work with local restaurants or cafes in the summer months to provide salads and produce which would be otherwise unpicked in the Summer holidays. Herbs may be given to butchers to make "Broomwood sausages", or cookery links could be made with local chefs who might be willing to show children how to use their produce.

If a local flower show exists, children love to enter their produce or flowers, and if done on behalf of the school some excellent recognition can be earned!

You can link with other local schools and share best practice by maybe hosting your own flower show in the summer term and invite them to attend with different categories to suit the school's growing ability.

Showcase your developing outdoor areas at every opportunity giving garden tours and explanations of individual learning areas.

See if there's a community payback initiative in the area and enquire to get more raised beds or containers built. You could also see which larger businesses in the area are willing to offer help through corporate responsibility schemes.

Community Garden

A school garden is often the perfect opportunity to engage groups from the wider community to promote healthy eating, more play and learning opportunities for the children and a chance for volunteers to give back to the school.

Offering parents the chance to garden with their children is a very powerful way to provide some much-needed bonding, where no screens are in sight, and there's plenty of fresh air. Children are also often very proud to show parents what they've been up to in the school garden.

Parents will be keener to form working parties if dates and times are sent out far enough in advance. Pester power from children also works a treat if the children get excited about particular projects!

Grandparents are a crucial untapped resource, where parents are time poor and grandparents are fitter and more able than ever, plus they largely support gardening initiatives and have a lot to offer.

Ways to engage them include planning a "Get Your grown-ups Gardening" day, asking for donations of plants or materials and asking for help and advice and Governor days where children can show the benefit they get from outdoor learning in nature.

On top of this, regular features in the weekly digital newsletter and a dedicated section on the school website could all be used to promote the movement at Broomwood towards a more community focus using the grounds.



How to ensure the outdoor environment is used effectively

Even with the most fantastic outdoor space, many schools fail to make best use of it, and this is entirely down to the ongoing support and commitment of the Head Teacher and leadership team to ensure staff are encouraged and trained in the best way to plan to use the outdoors.

Broomwood is already doing some amazing outdoor learning, through Forest School. However, for the approach to be fully integrated and available to all, it's paramount that the whole school staff are on board and educated in basic strategies and skills to give them the knowledge and confidence to learn outdoors regularly.

This also ensures that the weight of the work needing doing doesn't rest on one or two shoulders.

An approach based on constant drip-fed training is best, as it cannot be underestimated that staff need to build new skills, not least the confidence to take lessons outside. Organizing ongoing CPD is crucial to the success of Outdoor Learning. However, learning to become a Master Gardener for example is not one of the skills required, so it's important staff are aware of what is and isn't expected of them.

Sharing ideas is one of the easiest ways of encouraging staff to become more familiar with taking their class outside. Hearing from other teachers what worked well for them and what didn't, or how they teach different parts of the curriculum effectively outdoors is more likely to drive your teachers to give it a go.

Whole staff CPD days are excellent but need planning well in advance for inset days.

Growing Together days- where the whole school is off timetable are more likely to happen, and give everyone the chance to create, play and learn outside. These days are definitely non-uniform for everyone and require a bit of planning in advance to make sure everyone knows what they are doing on the day. It can be a great way to achieve lots in the outdoors and create some great new areas.

It's also worth bearing in mind that when children are first given the freedom to learn outdoors, they will be quite excited. This will change though in time, as long as clear ground rules are set by the teachers and children become more relaxed and familiar with their lessons being held outside, not inside.

At first it might be an idea to encourage teachers to just spend a small amount of time per week outside, say 10 minutes each day to support lessons in the classroom. As they build techniques for managing this you can increase the amount of time.

Communication is also key – sometimes successful lessons outside, new features being built or achievements in managing behaviour being made by certain teachers are not shared effectively enough, but could be easy wins if there is a structured way to let other staff know the details.

Staff meetings should regularly have an update on the Outdoor Learning Plan, so that everyone is aware and excited about the changes taking place. These will also then need to be communicated effectively to TA's and children.

The more the staff and children are all involved in these changes, the more sustainable they will be, and the more everyone will benefit from them.



General Links to the curriculum

Maths

- 🌱 Using the raised beds, you can measure, estimate, work out area and capacity.
- 🌱 Measuring out square planting areas you can use seed packets to work out spacings, patterns, times tables.
- 🌱 Measure plants, calculate percentages from numbers germinated, collect data.
- 🌱 If selling produce / enterprise you can use IT for profit and loss, calculate costs and work out break even points. Measure produce, weights, amounts, money. Use charts.

Literacy

- 🌱 Reading seed packets, gardening books and discussing what to grow and why and where.
- 🌱 Creative writing based on sensory experiences, based on what they do in the different areas of the garden.
- 🌱 Poetry from nature, feelings they experience in the outdoors, weather etc. Recipe writing based on produce grown, instructional writing.

Science

- 🌱 Plants – a wide variety of plants and their needs will be available to study
- 🌱 Animals – creating more habitats should give children more to discover and enquire about
- 🌱 Everyday materials – in the mini gardens different materials can be used to construct these and monitor how they react outside and with the weather.
- 🌱 Living things and their habitats – there will be many varied habitats from woodland to prairie wildflower meadows
- 🌱 Rocks – when planting or just dig holes and discover soils
- 🌱 Light – effect on plants, sun and shade. A polytunnel or covered growing area allows greater expanse of this learning
- 🌱 Seasonal changes – effect of weather on different plants and habitats
- 🌱 Sound – the swish of long grasses or wind chimes

Geography

- 🌱 Land use, local compared to wider community and country. Compare what happens at school with farming in general and compare food growing in other countries.
- 🌱 Look at climate here and abroad and how it affects farming and food availability.
- 🌱 Use the outdoors to compose maps, compass points, contours. Look at effects on weather
- 🌱 Water Cycle – collecting water in a water butt, using it on the crops and so on.
- 🌱 Think about environmental issues – look at use of recycled materials in the garden, rainwater.
- 🌱 Energy needed to produce food on a large-scale vs at school.
- 🌱 Sustainability – compost making, food growing, energy use

History

- 👉 How land use has changed over time – locally, school grounds historically
- 👉 Talk about food growing to feed civilisations – compared to how easy or hard it is to grow food at school.
- 👉 Natural disasters such as floods, drought and their effect in history
- 👉 How would the land and its properties affect the ability of a civilization to succeed – eg being near water for food growing and drinking, having to farm on very sandy soil etc.

DT, Art and design

- 👉 Building raised beds, creating different outdoor spaces with different qualities and characteristics. Choice of colour, plants.
- 👉 Designing a garden from scratch. Which materials, what is the purpose etc.



Further information and resources

The Natural Connections Project

[England's largest outdoor learning project reveals children more motivated to learn when outside - GOV.UK](#)

Report from Ofsted on Learning Outside the Classroom

[Microsoft Word - Lningoutsdetheclssrm.doc](#)

Food Growing in Schools taskforce Summary

[FGISExecutiveSummaryMarch2012.pdf](#)

RHS Campaign for School Gardening

[School gardening / RHS](#)

Muddy Hands Report – Outdoor Classroom Day

[Muddy hands report - Outdoor Classroom Day UK & Ireland](#)

Leadership for embedding outdoor learning within the primary curriculum

[Leadership for embedding outdoor learning within the primary curriculum - GOV.UK](#)

Creating Our Barefoot Sensory Path

[Inquiring Minds: Mrs. Myers' Kindergarten: Creating Our Barefoot Sensory Path and the Importance of Outdoor Play](#)



For more information, and to kick start your outdoor learning journey, please contact us.

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Disclaimer

Please note that the views expressed in this report are for guidance only. Any injury or costs arising from acting on these views are held at the Schools own liability.