

# **Outdoor Spaces for Play and Learning in Special Schools**

**GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS**

**13 SEPTEMBER 2021**

## Contents

Executive Summary .....	3
Section 1 - Background and Rationale .....	4
Section 2 - Outline of Programme .....	5
Section 3 - Financial Arrangements .....	8
Section 4 - Management Arrangements.....	9
Section 5 - Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation .....	11
Section 6 - Help and Support .....	13

## Executive Summary

- (i) The programme aim is *'to limit any long-term adverse impact of the COVID-19 lockdown through the better understanding and development of existing outdoor spaces that will support the delivery of high quality creative and innovative play and learning experiences for all children and young people in special schools'*. Settings are encouraged to implement new approaches to supporting pupils and innovate in ways that will enhance existing approaches.
- (ii) The overall programme budget September 2021 to March 2022 is £800K. No funding is presently available beyond 31 March 2022 and schools should not commit to expenditure without further funding having been confirmed.
- (iii) Settings will design their programme delivery based on their unique circumstances and their pupils' needs. They know their pupils best and will use their professional judgement to decide upon relevant priorities. This can also include building capacity within the staff team to support outdoor play and learning.
- (iv) In designing and implementing their interventions, settings should take into account the objectives of the programme, which they should 'contextualise' in order to reflect the particular needs and circumstances of their setting and pupils.
- (v) Individual settings will evaluate the outcome of the programme against the specific targets they established at the beginning of the academic year, using the measures they choose to assess the impact of the programme in their setting. **Settings will complete the Project Outline document by Thursday 30 September 2021, setting out their plans to deliver the programme, and then a Project Completion document by Friday 29 April 2022 providing their evaluation of its impact.**
- (vi) Settings must plan to continue delivering the programme during any further periods of remote learning.
- (vii) Individual allocations due to each setting have been published on the Department's website and will be advised to special schools directly via the Education Authority (EA). Funding has been based on enrolment numbers.
- (viii) A range of help and advice is available to assist settings with regards to implementing the programme at Section 6 Help and Support.

## Section 1 - Programme Background and Rationale

1. For most children and young people attending special schools this last year may have added to feelings of isolation and anxiety thereby negatively affecting children's emotional and mental health. Social isolation is nothing new for children and young people with SEND. In 'normal' times, they are likely to often feel isolated and lonely.
2. The arrival of COVID-19, and the measures taken to mitigate it, compounded these feelings further due to the need for some children to shield and the closure of all clubs/groups that the young people might normally attend. This programme is intended to encourage a creative approach to the utilisation of outdoor spaces to support the children's overall development, communication skills, personal development and emotional wellbeing.
3. The programme has been co-designed with a range of key stakeholders and the integration of lessons learned during the first year of implementation of the 'Engage for Special Schools Programme'. Representatives of sectoral bodies and experienced school practitioners have also assisted in this process.

### **Budget**

4. The overall budget for programme in the 2021/22 financial year (September 2021 to March 2022) is c£800K.
5. **Failure to have submitted returns for previous funding programmes may result in your allocation being withdrawn.**
6. **Funding must be fully used in the period for which it is allocated.**

## Section 2 - Outline of Programme

### Programme Aim

7. *To limit any long-term adverse impact of the COVID-19 lockdown through the better understanding and development of existing outdoor spaces that will support the delivery of high quality creative and innovative play and learning experiences for all children and young people in special schools.*

### Programme Objectives

8. Given the unique circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, all special schools in Northern Ireland will receive funding to create bespoke a programme focused on outdoor play & learning that will:
  - Increase capacity for the better use of creative outdoor spaces for play and learning opportunities for all children and young people.
  - Increase children's physical; mental health and wellbeing and social interaction, through high quality outdoor play and learning
  - Support pupils to increase their motivation, engagement, resilience, self-esteem and confidence, through better engagement in play.
  - Support the children and young people to improve their mobility and co-ordination within the outdoor play environment
  - Support and enhance pupils' development including personal capabilities and managing risks in safe outdoor spaces.
  - Build capacity within the educational workforce to make better use of the space available for creative and innovative opportunities for outdoor play and learning.
  - Complement and enhance the existing work of schools (such as extended schools, special education needs and/or nurture provision). *Note: Schools can supplement the funding provided to deliver the programme with delegated funding available to schools for example from the Extended Schools Programme in order to increase the level of support provided.*

### What does the programme look like?

9. There is no prescriptive or suggested ideal model for what the programme delivery should look like or specific parameters for settings to follow, such as an exclusive focus on particular groups of pupils, year groups, or particular subjects.
10. Settings are encouraged to explore creative and innovative approaches to outdoor learning, in deciding how to utilise the funding to address pupil needs.

11. Settings know their pupils best and have autonomy and flexibility to use their professional judgement to decide upon relevant priorities and which pupils and year groups will participate in the programme. So too, the content and structure of programme delivery, will be based on each setting's unique circumstances and assessment of particular needs.
12. It is widely recognised that Covid-19 and its response may have impacted on the social and emotional health and well-being of children, and settings may wish to link the programme to other funding streams which support this work.
13. **Fundamentally, it is for settings to decide how to best utilise programme funding within the aim and objectives of the programme in order to maximise positive outcomes for their pupils.**
14. The funding may also be used to support building capacity within the staff team to support outdoor play and learning and also to design potential future provision in currently underutilised outdoor space.
15. Settings are permitted to spend an element of their budget on materials and equipment (in line with EA finance guidelines) but only when this is necessary to support delivery of the programme. Spend on equipment items above £1000 is not permitted.
16. The funding allocated is not to be used to facilitate any Covid-19 related social distancing requirements or to cover sick or 'other leave' absence of normal classroom teachers.

## **Outcomes**

17. In line with the programme aim *'to limit any long-term adverse impact of the COVID-19 lockdown through the better understanding and development of existing outdoor spaces that will support the delivery of high quality creative and innovative play and learning experiences for all children and young people in special schools'*, there are no specific targets for the programme in terms of system wide improvement of Key Stage or examination outcomes.
18. Individual settings identify intended outcomes and the particular success criteria for the programme in line with their own specific target objectives, as well as the associated measures (formal/informal, qualitative/quantitative as appropriate) to evaluate the effectiveness of their approach and the impact of the resource.
19. Whilst it is anticipated that this may reveal improvements in such things as building pupil confidence, increasing levels of motivation and engagement, enhancing pupil

attitudes to learning, encouraging school creativity and innovation as well as assessing individual pupil progress in learning, this will be determined at setting level.

20. Also see Section 5 *Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation*.

### **Contingency Planning**

21. While delivery of the programme would ideally take place within the setting, settings must remain cognisant of the potential for further periods of remote learning during the second year of the programme.

22. Settings must therefore consider contingency planning for how the programme element of support physical activity may be delivered on a remote basis or through a blended learning approach according to the particular context at any given time.

23. Details of contingency planning should be incorporated in to the Programme Outline request

### **What allocation will my setting receive?**

24. As all of the 39 Special Schools have an above average (>28%) FSME, the cost assumptions have been based on a maximum allocation amount of £29,936K per school and the size/ enrolment numbers of the schools was used to determine an allocation band.

**Table 1 – Funding allocations for Special Schools (This is based on the data provided for School Census 20/21)**

Enrolment Number	Amount of Allocation
0-10	£4,932
11-30	£9,936
31-80	£12,436
81-100	£14,936
101-130	£16,936
131-170	£19,936
171-190	£22,436
191-230	£24,936
231 - 280	£27,436
281 - 350	£29,936

**Funding for each setting – published list at Annex A**

25. Details of individual allocations due to each setting have been published at Annex A. These have been based on the data available through the School Census 20/21 and do not take account of any additional places for this new academic year.

### Section 3 - Financial Arrangements

26. There is **no application process** for settings to follow in accessing relevant funding for the programme. **Settings will be required however to submit a Programme Outline Plan by 30 September.**

27. All settings are responsible for ensuring that their expenditure is in line with the programme objectives and is monitored and reported on as per agreed methodology.

28. Settings must manage the programme on the basis that the resources being made available in September 2021 must be spent in full by the end of March 2022.

29. **Settings should be aware that there are certain conditions attached to programme monies. Please refer to Section 5 ‘Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation’ which explains the associated accountability requirements.**

30. **For the avoidance of doubt, - the funding allocated is not to be used to facilitate any Covid-19 related social distancing requirements or to cover sick or ‘other leave’ absence of normal staff.**

#### Tracking Expenditure

31. Specific finance codes will be established to enable spend on the programme to be tracked accordingly. The EA Special Schools Finance Team will advise of the function codes once the programme launches.

#### Other Funding Streams

32. It will be possible for settings to use other funding streams to supplement delivery of the programme. For example, Engage II funding; health and well-being funding

33. Additional earmarked funding made available through the Extended Schools (ES) programme can also assist with meeting pupil needs arising from Covid-19. Whilst, in line with existing policy, ES funding cannot be used to employ or maintain teachers to deliver curriculum based provision during the normal school/setting day, it can however be used for a wide variety of other purposes e.g. health and well-being activities; language support, homework clubs and other learning



activities outside of timetabled school hours; enhancing the learning environment; programmes for parents and wider community etc.

34. If schools need further advice or clarification in respect of the programme and use of related funding in 2021/22, they should speak to the EA's Special Schools Finance Team. Contact details are included at Section 6 '*Help and Support*'.

## **Section 4 - Management Arrangements**

35. All settings due to their knowledge and understanding have autonomy and flexibility to use their professional judgement to decide which of their pupils will participate in the programme. They will also structure and design the programme within their setting based on their own unique circumstances.

### **Type of staff and delivery by third parties**

36. The programme allows for a degree of flexibility to facilitate a wider range of interventions in special schools that can address some of the presenting factors within their cohort of children and young people eg: play training/therapeutic training for staff to make better use of play equipment; music/art/ play therapy; creation of sensory gardens; visual stimulations areas; development of wildflower planters; bug hotels
37. The programme will focus on supporting pupils' emotional, social and physical wellbeing, with a strong focus on physical activity and outdoor play to develop gross motor skills which children may have had fewer opportunities to develop during lockdown.

### **Provision outside the normal school day**

38. Schools and settings are permitted to deliver provision outside the normal school/setting day.

### **Spend on materials and equipment**

39. Schools and settings have some flexibility to spend an element of their funding on materials and equipment for use within the programme. This only applies when such materials are essential in delivering the programme and will represent a small element of the setting's budget. The focus of the programme will remain on settings designing and implementing an appropriately differentiated programme of child centred support to pupils.

## How should additional staff be sourced?

40. It is not anticipated that schools should require additional staff to facilitate this programme, however all settings have flexibility to manage the recruitment process as they see fit and how the additional staff will be used within the setting. For instance, it is possible to backfill a post to allow a current member of staff to be released to deliver programme activities.
41. In line with the desire for settings to retain autonomy with decisions relating to the programme, they will manage the recruitment process for staff, including for teachers. This will involve engaging staff on a “fixed-term” basis, or in the case of teachers either on a fixed term basis or drawing down the resource from the Northern Ireland Substitute Teacher Register (NISTR).
42. It is appreciated that the recruitment of staff can take time. Settings are reminded that programme funding during the period for which it is allocated. If there is any anticipated delay in recruiting, they should plan and use funding to ensure full spend within the specified time period. Before engaging staff the setting needs to ensure they are clear on the duration and end date for the post and the reason for the post. This will facilitate the process of bringing the post to an end when funding ceases.
43. For those settings employing staff with funding there are a range of practical issues to be considered (e.g. statutory/legal requirements, contracts, terms and conditions, advertising of posts; interviewing, salary scales, timescales etc). Further detailed advice has been developed by the Education Authority in the form of Frequently Asked Questions which settings may find helpful. These FAQs can be found here [www.eani.org.uk/ea-staff-hub/hr-online/hiring-managers-recruitment-information](http://www.eani.org.uk/ea-staff-hub/hr-online/hiring-managers-recruitment-information). This link also includes information on the substitute teacher process, sample job descriptions and person specifications as well as useful contact details in the event of any recruitment based queries. See also Section 6 ‘*Help and Support*’.
44. Schools should manage NISTR engagements and/or recruitment processes in line with existing policy and guidance, for example [‘EA’s Teaching Appointments Scheme for Controlled Schools’](#) and [TNC Circular 2016/01 on the ‘Appropriate Use of NISTR’](#).

## Section 5 - Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation

### Accountability

45. There are no specific targets for the programme in terms of system wide improvement of Key Stage or examination outcomes - the focus of the programme is *'to limit any long-term adverse impact of the COVID-19 lockdown through the better understanding and development of existing outdoor spaces that will support the delivery of high quality creative and innovative play and learning experiences for all children and young people in special schools'*.
46. It will be for settings to identify their own intended outcomes and associated success criteria and to monitor and evaluate the impact of the programme using internal assessment systems, including the use of teacher recording and observation to monitor the progress of pupils selected for support through the programme.
47. It will be necessary however for the Department to collate high level information about the use and impact of programme resources for accountability purposes to enable determinations to be made around the effectiveness and value for money of the programme. It will also seek to provide assurances to the Minister of Education, Executive, Assembly, statutory bodies, families and wider community about the impact of significant investment of public funding.

### Initial Programme Outline Plan

48. Participating settings are required to complete an initial Programme Outline Plan which captures a range of key information in respect of the focus of programme, how the resources are being used and an evaluation of impact. **The form will be emailed to settings W/B 13 September for completion and return by Thursday 30 September.** In the meantime settings should assess needs and begin the process of establishing the most appropriate form of provision.
49. The Department will also host an **online programme Q&A session** for those special schools who wish to attend to raise any issues/ queries they may have in relation to the programme. The proposed date for this **Friday 17 September 2021 at 2pm**
50. The emphasis in evaluation will be the impact on pupils' social, emotional well-being through the introduction of creative and innovation opportunities for outdoor play and learning. Evidenced-based judgements of the programme by schools will then inform further development of interventions.

## End of Programme Monitoring

51. Settings will then be **required to complete an End of Programme Monitoring Form for return by Friday 29 April 2022**. This will also include the provision a number of case studies depending on the level of funding received for the programme.

<b>Level of Funding Received</b>	<b>Number of Case Studies Required</b>
Up to £12,436	1 case study
Up to £19,936	2 case studies
Up to £29,936	3 case studies

52. A case study is a very important qualitative method of capturing impact. It is an approach to qualitative research with focus on specific in-depth analysis of a particular pupil, intervention or whole school improvement process in relation to the increased opportunities for outdoor play and learning provisions supported by the programme. A case study should be no more than 1 side of an A4 page but should capture all relevant details.

**53. Settings should note that completion of both the Programme Outline and End of Programme Report are mandatory. If it is not completed by the relevant deadlines, settings will be contacted and funding could be withdrawn.**

## System Level Evaluation

54. At system level, the sponsor team will monitor the outworking of the programme and will create a 'Programme Score Card' that demonstrates the type/quantity of the activities undertaken; how well was it received within the school by pupils/parents and staff; and the overall impact (this will be demonstrated by the case studies).

55. The sponsor team will ensure processes are in place to help identify where effective practice is observed through the programme and disseminate more widely across schools.

56. Details of the programme will be provided the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and published on the Department of Education website.

## Section 6 - Help and Support

57. A range of help and advice is available to assist settings with regards to implementing the programme.

**58. A full meeting of all 39 special school leaders is proposed for W/B 13 September to provide briefing in relation to the programme.**

59. Staff from the Department Sponsor Team are available to assist with questions in relation to programme planning.

60. Should you be in any doubt about any of the information contained in this guidance, you can contact the relevant contact point, according to the nature of the query, as outlined below:

### Contact Points

#### *Education Authority*

- **EA – Link Officers**
- **EA Special Schools Team**
  
- **EA Recruitment:**

**Email:** School Recruitment: [schoolsrecruitment@eani.org.uk](mailto:schoolsrecruitment@eani.org.uk); Online Recruitment System Administration Support: [onlinerecruitmentsystemadmin@eani.org.uk](mailto:onlinerecruitmentsystemadmin@eani.org.uk)

**Telephone: 028 9056 4301 then press:**

1. Headquarters/Corporate Recruitment
2. South West School Recruitment
3. North School Recruitment
4. East School Recruitment
5. Pre-employment Checks/Access NI
6. System helpdesk

- **EA Finance** –Telephone: 02825 661141

#### ***Department of Education***

- Special Education Team email: [specialeducationteam@education-ni.gov.uk](mailto:specialeducationteam@education-ni.gov.uk)

## Helpful Resources

- **Barry Carpenter – Sports and Sensory Sanctuaries**  
<https://barrycarpentereducation.com/2021/06/02/sports-and-sensory-sanctuaries/>
- **CCEA – Learning Outdoors in the Early Years**  
<https://ccea.org.uk/downloads/docs/ccea-asset/Curriculum/Learning%20Outdoors%20in%20the%20Early%20Years.pdf>
- **Eco-Schools NI**  
<https://eco-schoolsni.org/eco-schoolsni/documents/007123.pdf>
- **Empowering Little Minds-** Group Sensory Woodland Experiences  
<https://www.empoweringlittleminds.co.uk/>
- **Learning through Landscapes (LtL)**  
LtL are a leading UK-based charity dedicated to enhancing outdoor learning and play for children  
<https://www.ltl.org.uk/free-resources/>
- **The Muddy Puddle Teacher-** Outdoor Continuous Provision Training  
<https://themuddypuddleteacher.co.uk/>
- **Northern Ireland Forest School Association**  
<https://www.communityni.org/organisation/northern-ireland-forest-school-association>
- **Outdoor Classroom Day**  
Outdoor Classroom Day is a global movement to inspire and celebrate outdoor play and learning, at home and at school.  
<https://outdoorclassroomday.org.uk/resources/lesson-ideas/>
- **Playboard NI**  
PlayBoard NI is an independent charity and the lead organisation for the development and promotion of children and young people's play in Northern Ireland.  
<https://www.playboard.org/resources/>  
<https://www.playboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Supporting-Children-With-Additional-Needs-Through-Play-July-2020.pdf>  
<https://www.playboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/TOPS-Advice-For-Schools-Aug-2020.pdf>

- **School Outdoor Learning**  
<https://schooloutdoorlearning.com/curriculum-linked-resources/>
- **Teach Outdoors**- online training  
<https://www.teachoutdoors.co.uk/>
- **The Conservation Volunteers**  
<https://www.tcv.org.uk/northernireland/>
- **The Early Years Training Hub**- Developing High Quality Outdoor Play Provision  
<https://www.theearlyyearstraininghub.co.uk/>
- **The Education People**- Strategic Improvement Visit- Outdoor Provision  
<https://www.theeducationpeople.org/>
- **The Great Outdoors**- Developing Children's Learning through Outdoor Provision  
<https://www.early-education.org.uk/great-outdoors>
- **The Outdoor Teacher**- Training Resources  
<https://www.theoutdoorteacher.com/courses>
- **TT Education- The School Improvement Company**- Creative Outdoor Learning through Outdoor Learning- live stream or recorded training  
<https://www.tteducation.co.uk/cpd-courses-inset/other-curriculum/creative-outdoor-learning/>

## Video Resources

- <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=outdoor+classrooms+ideas&qpv=tdre&FORM=VDRE>

## Outdoor Provision in Special School Settings 2021 - Creative Ideas for Sharing

*“Children are disappearing from the outdoors at a rate that would make them top of any conservationist’s list of endangered species if they were any other member of the animal kingdom.”-Tim Gill*

- Sensory Garden
- Wildflower meadow with bug hotel
- The Daily Mile Track/Path
- Visual Stimulation area- mirrors, sequinned material, spinning spiral
- Eco house/Transition Hut
- Hobbit Playhouse
- Play/sensory trail
- Fairy Garden
- Outdoor Sight Word and Picture Wall
- Large Scale Communication Board
- Sound Therapy Zone
- Heavy Loads-great for self-regulation: outdoor beanbags, peanut ball, monkey bars, wheelbarrows
- Wheelchair inclusive picnic table
- Breakout areas- Tent Village each with a particular theme
- Covered Sand Play and Water tubes
- Small World Zones
- In Ground Trampolines
- In-Out Shapes
- Walk and Talk Seating Circle
- Wheelchair friendly Sensory Tunnel and Sensory Arbour
- Sensory Gazebo
- Outdoor Musical World- musical equipment
- Wheelchair swings and bicycles
- Musical Stage
- Amphitheatre with grass topped seats
- Outdoor clothing
- Vegetable patches

*NB: While some of these are larger items of equipment, which would be outside of the current remit, the programme monies can be used to support the development of a clear plan for potential re-design of space that would incorporate these items. This would mean that should capital monies become available schools would be ready to make use of it.*



## Annex A

Outdoor Provision Allocation By Enrolment Numbers					Sept-Mar 21/22 Allocated Amount
DE ref	school name	boys	girls	total pupils	
2316695	Ardnashee School and College	231	111	342	£29,936.00
1336548	St Gerard's School and Support Services	239	94	333	£29,936.00
3316676	Castletower School	248	82	330	£29,936.00
1310014	Harberton Special School	215	84	299	£29,936.00
4310008	Beechlawn Special School	184	70	254	£27,436.00
1310003	Cedar Lodge Special School	202	45	247	£27,436.00
3316512	Sandelford Special School	164	65	229	£24,936.00
4310013	Killard House Special School	159	60	219	£24,936.00
4316273	Longstone Special School	155	59	214	£24,936.00
3316510	Hill Croft Special School	149	61	210	£24,936.00
5316519	Rathore School	145	55	200	£24,936.00
4316515	Parkview Special School	141	58	199	£24,936.00
4316517	Tor Bank Special School	137	56	193	£24,936.00
1316569	Glenveagh Special School	127	56	183	£22,436.00
4316518	Clifton Special School	119	57	176	£22,436.00
3310018	Rosstulla Special School	118	55	173	£22,436.00
5316521	Ceara Special School	115	58	173	£22,436.00
3316570	Kilronan Special School	108	54	162	£19,936.00
3316514	Roddensvale Special School	113	48	161	£19,936.00
2316661	Arvalee School and Resource Centre	110	46	156	£19,936.00
2316694	Willowbridge School	110	46	156	£19,936.00
4316022	Brookfield Special School	113	39	152	£19,936.00
2316662	Rossmar Special School	100	44	144	£19,936.00
1310012	Fleming Fulton Special School	77	64	141	£19,936.00
2316528	Knockavoe School & Resource Centre	101	39	140	£19,936.00
4316516	Knockevin Special School	100	40	140	£19,936.00
5316523	Sperrinview Special School	95	35	130	£17,436.00
1316500	Park Education Resource Centre	87	38	125	£17,436.00
5316520	Donard Special School	89	35	124	£17,436.00
1316582	Oakwood School and Assessment Centre	82	30	112	£17,436.00
5316577	Lisanally Special School	66	41	107	£17,436.00
3316609	Riverside Special School	70	29	99	£14,936.00
1310016	Mitchell House Special School	51	44	95	£14,936.00
3316547	Thornfield House School	70	21	91	£14,936.00
3340002	Jordanstown Special School	49	27	76	£12,436.00
1310017	Greenwood House Assessment Centre	54	13	67	£12,436.00
1316584	Clarawood Special School	22	2	24	£9,936.00
4310019	Ardmore House Special School	19	0	19	£9,936.00
4316614	Lakewood Special School	2	6	8	£4,932.00
				6403	£800,000.00