

Pre-school and foundation stage: delivering the curriculum outdoors

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Introduction

Children in the pre-school and primary sectors returned to school on 8 March 2021, following a period of lockdown as a result of the ongoing pandemic. Subsequently, district inspectors from the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) have worked alongside primary principals and pre-school leaders to understand how they adapted and developed the use of the outdoor learning environment to support curriculum delivery as outlined in the [Curricular Guidance for Pre-school](#) and the [Northern Ireland Curriculum: Primary](#).

Throughout May and June 2021, district inspectors engaged in conversations with principals and pre-school leaders and visited a sample of 43 settings, including 5 nursery units, 7 nursery schools, 16 voluntary pre-school playgroups and foundation stage classes in 17 primary schools. Inspectors, in agreement with the settings^[1], observed children's engagement in outdoor learning across the pre-school and foundation stage curricula. In addition, information was provided by the employing authorities and a range of advisory and support bodies on the support provided to date on developing learning outdoors in the early years.

Over the past number of years, ETI has reported on the importance of increasing opportunities for children to engage in learning outdoors; ETI has also highlighted good practice in developing outdoor learning through several dissemination of good practice events. Since March 2020, the provision of outdoor learning opportunities has developed at a much quicker pace in both pre-school settings and foundation stage classes because, given the pandemic situation there is a very real reason to focus much more on the potential of outdoor learning. The increased focus on outdoor learning reported in recent ETI reports¹ reflects how schools and pre-schools are responding to guidance from the Public Health Authority and the Department of Education around maximising the use of outdoor space to promote learning, health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report provides information on the extent to which the delivery of the curriculum through outdoor learning is effective across early years and the foundation stage. It highlights some of the successes and also the challenges reported by staff and reflects the range of external support that is available. Primary and pre-schools should find the following considerations beneficial when identifying the priorities, actions and resources within their transitional, amended or extended Development Plans.

¹ Throughout this document the term 'settings' refers to the range of pre-school providers and primary school foundation stage classes. Where findings are specific to one sector the term 'pre-school' or 'foundation stage' will be used.

² [Pre-school Examples of Approaches to Learning and Teaching during the COVID-19 Recovery Phase Pre-school Phase Report September 2018 - December 2020](#)

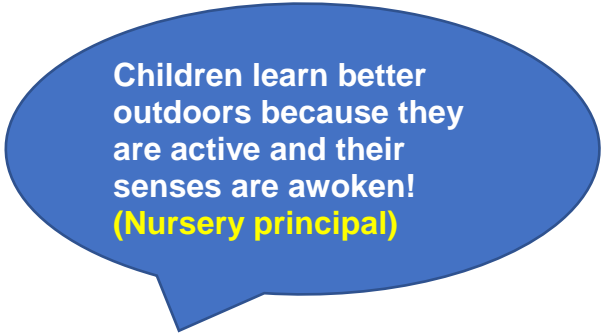
Outdoor learning environments

In most of the settings visited the outdoor physical learning environment is safe and secure; it is well planned, resourced and divided appropriately into distinct areas for different types of learning. These include, for example: imaginative role play areas; creative areas for art and craft; construction areas; scientific exploration zones; and, cosy book areas. The inclusion of age appropriate signage provides good opportunities for the development of early language and communication skills.

Foundation stage classes usually have more flexibility to use a range of spaces because of their access to the primary school grounds, including tarmacked and grassed areas, forest school areas or courtyards. These additional spaces are not always developed or utilised fully enough. In a minority of settings, the limitations due to the small size of the outdoor space or the presence of too much equipment minimises the space for children to move freely and impacts negatively on the effectiveness of the energetic play activities.

Storage space in most pre-school settings has been enhanced recently through Department of Education (DE) and Education Authority (EA) funding and is adequate overall. All primary schools have open playground spaces. At the time of the visits, outdoor storage space was limited in a majority (64%) of primary schools. This restricts the range of activities and resources available to enhance the children's learning and the children's ability to access resources independently and for them to take increased responsibility in the outdoor spaces to care for and put away the resources and equipment when finished.

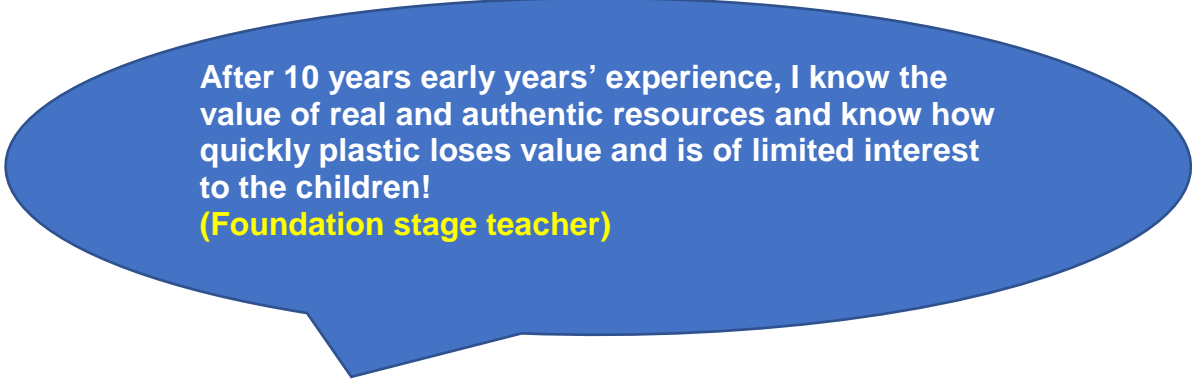
Transitions from the classroom to the outdoor area are facilitated well in most settings by the ease of access from the playroom/classroom to the outdoor space.



Children learn better outdoors because they are active and their senses are awoken!
(Nursery principal)

There is weather-related variation in the use of outdoor space due to: the unavailability of suitable all-weather clothing for the children; access to a covered area; and, the negative impact of wet weather on surfaces and equipment. A number of settings used additional money through COVID-19 Restart funding or the Wellbeing Fund to purchase all-weather suits for the children in order to maximise the use of outdoor learning opportunities. In the absence of any covered outdoor areas, a small number of the primary schools visited use temporary canopies and umbrellas to provide shade and shelter, thereby enabling the foundation stage children to continue to play outdoors in virtually all weathers.

The evidence clearly shows that the most effective use of resources occurs when the staff evaluate the learning needs of the children and use this information to provide a matched range and variety of age and stage appropriate equipment; this is well presented to promote choice, decision-making and self-management.



After 10 years early years' experience, I know the value of real and authentic resources and know how quickly plastic loses value and is of limited interest to the children!
(Foundation stage teacher)

The larger fixed equipment provides a good challenge to the children for their physical development in those settings with appropriate space; it has limitations, however, when it obscures the view of the play area, takes up too much of the available space, or has limited flexibility to ensure opportunities for progressing the children's skills across the year. In smaller outdoor areas, flexible and moveable equipment has the advantage of allowing staff to be responsive to progressing the children's skills and needs and to make the best use of the available space.

Sharing the use of the outdoor space as a resource for the wider community is evident in a small number of settings, for example, with a local Sure Start project in the summer months or a local community group at weekends. A small number of schools have extended outdoor play to good effect using Shared Education funding, fostering good relations among neighbouring schools.

Additional funding from DE during the COVID-19 pandemic is valued by all settings, enabling them to purchase resources and to enhance many aspects of learning outdoors. Other funding streams have also been used to enhance the outdoor learning spaces, including funds raised by parents, applications to local companies and councils and grants from other bodies.

Where funding is more limited, the creative ideas of the staff team in combining real and natural items and resources enrich to good effect the quality of play experiences and learning for the children. Most leaders and principals expressed frustration, however, about the restrictions on how and when funding could be spent.

Risk assessments for outdoor play are used effectively by staff to identify potential risks and to inform mitigating actions.

Timetables are typically organised well to manage the use of space and to balance COVID-19 safety mitigations in order to provide a rich and stimulating space, with appropriate learning and resources. This is more demanding in settings where multiple classes use the same area. Staff manage the zoning either by fencing off areas or using different parts of the grounds for different classes. While some outdoor spaces are large enough to be divided and zoned for separate class bubbles, others were more problematic with the zones reducing the space available for children to have the necessary opportunities for energetic play.

Daily routines are well-established, including staggered intakes, hand washing before and after outdoor learning and cleaning or quarantining the equipment on a rota basis.

Staff training for outdoor learning is a priority in both pre-schools and schools; the demand, however, for this training greatly outweighs the availability. A small number of primary schools have paid for private consultants to access advice and to lead staff professional learning sessions.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the employing authorities and support bodies have been highlighting the importance and benefits of outdoor learning. They facilitate or signpost staff to a range of training opportunities, information webinars and support cluster groups; they report that the responses from those attending are largely positive. The support, resources and training provided focused on:

- the use of space and resources outdoors;
- the promotion of physical development and emotional wellbeing;
- the development of an holistic outdoor curriculum;
- the importance of engaging parents; and,
- the strategies to enable children with special educational needs (SEN) to benefit as fully as possible from the outdoor environment.

In order to support the development of children's resilience and problem-solving skills, children need to explore and understand their own physical limitations in an environment where risk is well managed. Currently this concept is not well enough understood by either practitioners or parents and the children's learning experiences are being adversely affected as a result. PlayBoard NI worked previously with DE on the Early Interventions Transformation Programme



'Play Matters' project. One of the resources, developed by PlayBoard was on [risk/challenge in play](#). Staff reported to inspectors that they would welcome further guidance and training on 'risky play'² from the EA including writing risk assessments for these areas of play. This is endorsed by ETI and would provide clarity and support for settings to manage safely, rather than avoid, risky play.

Practitioners report that they value using resources such as the EA's [Getting Ready to Learn](#) website. Further 'Transforming Practice' sessions are planned and will be delivered by Playboard NI; including two with a particular focus on the outdoors. There is also an increasing interest in the '[Forest School](#)' and '[Beach School](#)' training and in using these approaches across a whole school community to maximise the use of the school grounds.

All too often staff in early years' settings work in relative isolation, which is not conducive to ongoing professional learning and development. While staff welcome the online information and webinars on outdoor learning provided by the EA and other support bodies, they report that they would like additional opportunities, when the time is right, to visit other settings and share practice in clusters. They also report that they would like to have experienced early years' staff and personnel from support bodies visit them to provide on-site advice and guidance on the development of provision for outdoor learning. This is essential to ensure that the focus moves on from developing the physical environment and resources, to developing the role of the adults in promoting effective learning outdoors. Links to training and resources provided by support bodies are included at [Appendix 2](#).

Discussions with pre-school and primary leaders

The feedback from the online focus group of leaders who met with ETI inspectors aligns closely with the evidence and information gathered during the face-to-face discussions with leaders during visits by the district inspectors. The leaders report a significantly increased focus on planning for outdoor learning and articulate clearly the benefits it provides to the children's health, wellbeing and progression in learning. Most leaders have prioritised outdoor learning on their development plans with a focus on further developing the learning environment and improving the range of resources available to the children to extend learning. There is currently insufficient focus on the development and implementation of effective processes to monitor and evaluate the quality of the outdoor provision and the impact on the children's learning, progression, health and well-being.

² Risky play is play which supports children to manage risk in a safe environment.

Outdoor learning curriculum

Planning to include all areas of the curriculum outdoors and the promotion of an holistic cross-curricular approach to the delivery of learning is a strength in all of the settings visited. In most pre-schools, the planning enables the children to experience all six areas of the pre-school curriculum outdoors on a daily or weekly basis. In the foundation stage outdoor sessions observed, planning is most effectively linked to play-based learning when children apply and consolidate their skills and knowledge in an activity-based approach across the connected primary curricular areas. In addition, staff in the foundation stage plan for progression in learning through play in subject specific literacy, mathematics, physical education, and World Around Us outdoor lessons.

Developing the outdoor learning environment is about having the confidence to lift the restrictions, to be creative and stand over what works!

(Foundation stage teacher)



In a minority of the settings, the curriculum provided is less effective, due to a combination of a limited choice of activities, too few natural materials or insufficient time and space for the children to develop their ideas and creativity.

Role of the adult in supporting and promoting children's learning outdoors

Always use open-ended opportunities and never lose the stimulation and challenge to your thinking!
(Foundation stage teacher)

The staff-to-child ratio in the outdoor sessions observed varies significantly across the settings visited. In all settings, additional adults include extra general classroom assistants funded through the setting's own budget, students on placement and one-to-one classroom assistants for children with a statement of education needs. The number of adults available to supervise outdoor learning can impact negatively on how settings use their outdoor spaces.

In a minority of the settings visited, maintaining the adult to child ratio required for the health and safety of the children meant having to restrict the use of some outdoor learning areas. The biggest impact on the quality of the learning is not always related directly to the number of adults, but rather the development of a shared understanding by all adults on how to engage and participate to best effect with the children to promote their learning.

Where outdoor learning was most effective the staff:

- understand how to observe, wait and listen to the children; they build on and extend the children's ideas, interests, language thereby learning;
- make good use of open-ended questions to develop the children's thinking and problem-solving skills;
- are affirmative and encouraging in order to support reluctant learners, to celebrate progress and achievement as an individual or part of a team;
- intervene appropriately to support children to feel confident in the development of gross motor fundamental movement skills, to encourage participation in simple games and promote physical activity;

- model rich vocabulary, good sentence structures and accuracy in mathematical and scientific language according to the children's levels of progression in the foundation stage curricular areas; and
- build on the children's good understanding of spoken Irish in Irish Medium settings.

Some less effective practice was observed. Leaders in all settings need to consider ways to communicate expectations to staff and upskill all adults who work with the children to understand that their work is not only to supervise the children but to skilful staff interaction and impact on the development of the children's language and learning.

Personal Social and Emotional Development

In all of the settings visited the children enjoy playing outside, reconnecting with their friends after a lengthy period of learning at home and forming friendships with their peers in the class bubbles. Almost all of the children are well-settled, accepting of, and secure in, the new routines of the day; they co-operate fully with the rules of safe play and hand sanitisation.



Children are trusted in play to make decisions, to think outside the box to realise their plans and they know they are supported and helped to create their ideas!
(Foundation stage teacher)

The outdoor area typically provides plenty of physical space for children to extend their imagination and collaborate with other children during imaginative role play, develop well their social skills, including turn-taking, and taking part in associated messy and sensory play. Relationships are strengthened through collaborative play during simple games and activities where the children are happy to share, wait, take turns and develop resilience by persevering to solve problems. The children have opportunities to make choices about where they want to play and to initiate the creative use of the resources to represent their own ideas and interests.

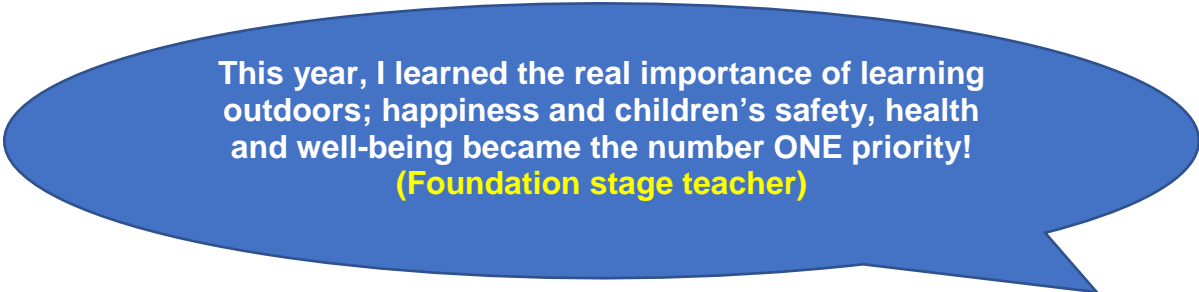
Almost all of the children identified with special educational needs are able to self-regulate, engage in activities and co-operate well with staff in the outdoor environment. A small number of children with complex needs, however, have difficulty engaging in play without additional adult support.

The daily routines for hand washing and snack have had to become more adult-led minimising the children's opportunities to develop independence at these activities. The most skilful staff still use these daily routines to maximise the social and language development opportunities as they engage with the children.

Progression in personal, social and emotional development across the foundation stage was evident when the children collaborate and negotiate with each other to develop their play in more complex ways and are able to explain their reasoning. Teachers foster this progression at the end of a lesson by modelling the language of emotions and encouraging the children to express their feelings. The children practising passing on a smile to one another as they discuss what makes a good friend is an example of passing on positive emotions. A small number of foundation stage classes appropriately start the school day with a short session using outdoor physical equipment which helps the children to manage their emotions and behaviours to good effect.

Language and Communication

The opportunities for the children to develop their language and literacy skills through outdoor play is a key strength in a majority of the sessions observed across the early years settings. Children talk freely to staff and one another and listen attentively as required during their outdoor activities. In most settings staff engagements with the children are effective in extending the children's language and communication skills, thinking and vocabulary.



This year, I learned the real importance of learning outdoors; happiness and children's safety, health and well-being became the number ONE priority!
(Foundation stage teacher)

In all of the settings visited, the children enjoy early mark making activities such as using chalks outdoors on the tarmac to make marks, drawing pictures and initiating games such as hopscotch.



The most effective reading observed took place in quiet areas, such as dens or underneath a tepee where small groups or individual children enjoy browsing in books. Books were most commonly set aside in a separate area, reported as part of the safe COVID-19 practice, rather than fully integrated into play areas. While adults occasionally read to individual or groups of children during the play, overall, the planned use of books for whole-group stories and storytelling by the adults is less well developed; consequently this is an area for improvement across the settings.



Progression in language and communication across the foundation stage was evident in a majority of the classes visited where Foundation stage children are motivated by the staff to read and write simple words, phrases and sentences. They talk and listen with increasing understanding and awareness of the needs of others. A small number of the boys observed during the visits have limited listening skills and staff report that a majority of the children's handwriting skills are at a much earlier stage of development than they should be for the time of year.

Foundation stage teachers incorporate well aspects of literacy into activities linked to environmental themes, which challenge the children to read and write independently. The teachers report that those children identified as reluctant to 'have a go' at writing in the indoor classroom environment, often engage enthusiastically with writing activities outside.



The plenary sessions following outdoor learning provide the foundation stage children with a good opportunity to recall activities and talk about their discoveries, achievements and the learning that has taken place. This provides an important opportunity for progression in the foundation stage by extending the children's talking and listening skills.

The World Around Us

Across the settings visited the World Around Us curricular area is a key strength of the provision for learning in the outdoors. Activities focusing on the natural environment such as, feeding the birds, planting and growing herbs, flowers, fruit and vegetables or hunting for mini beasts, are evident in almost all settings. These activities encourage curiosity and sustained investigation and discovery and they combine the use of the children's senses, physical activity and talking and listening. There was evidence of high levels of engagement and enjoyment.



We live in a farming district and fields and animals can be viewed from our site....the change in the seasons stimulates great conversation and introduce new vocabulary.
(Naíscoil Leader - Voluntary IME setting)

In almost all of the settings visited, the freedom of using water outdoors stimulated enthusiastic investigation and experimentation. The children make good use of the large water trays, water walls, hoses and guttering to observe and experiment with the flow of water, explore capacity or enhance imaginative play such as a car wash or bathing baby dolls.



COVID-19 restrictions prevented the usual opportunities to take trips and invite special visitors into the settings to talk to the children around topics linked to the work. This impacts negatively on the stimulation and wider learning opportunities that these visitors and trips normally provide for the children and minimises the usual contact with families/carers who join these activities as volunteers and helpers.

Progression in the World Around Us across the foundation stage was evident when the activities lead to more complex talking and thinking, close observation and the children developing a deeper understanding of the environment. In nearly all the foundation stage classes visited, the children explore and problem-solve with water walls, developing a good understanding about collecting rain water and the recycling of materials such as old tyres or wheels for use as flower beds.



Physical Development

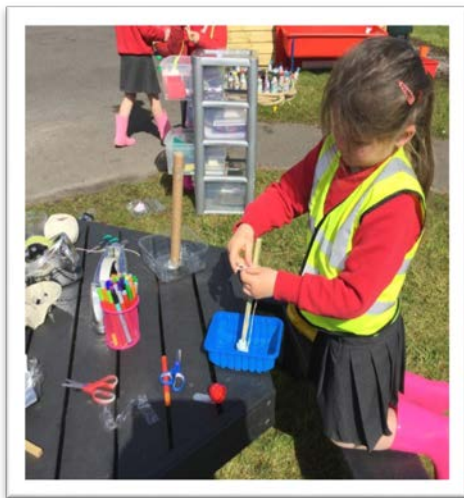
The use of outdoors to promote and progress the children's gross motor skills and energetic physical play is a strength in all types of settings. The children had opportunities to run, throw and catch, climb and balance on large equipment, dig, kick a ball and use pedal-wheeled toys. Where a setting has a range of surfaces, such as grass, tarmac, soft-play coverings or natural features in the environment, including hills, slopes and trees; then the children are able to test out and develop further their own physical skills and capabilities as they swing on a tree or ride their wheeled toys down a slope.



Staff report that the children are more resilient, confident and have better concentration in their learning after engaging in physical adventurous play and overcoming simple risks to keep themselves safe.

The children have a good awareness of how to use equipment safely; they are confident to ask the adults for help if they need it. In the best practice, the staff have a clear understanding of the progression of physical skills for young children and plan and model suitably challenging and progressive experiences.

The use of smaller equipment promotes the use of fine motor skills in the outdoor environment with 'loose parts'³ equipment.

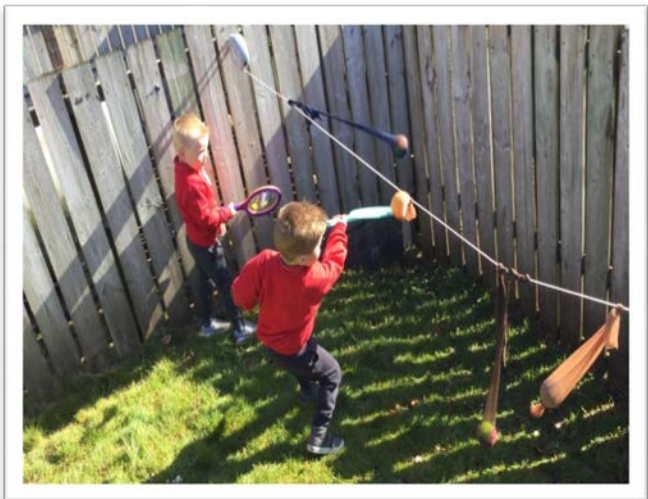


³ Loose parts are simple everyday objects which can be used to improve creativity, boost social and problem solving skills.

While a small number of the voluntary pre-schools do not have an outdoor area at all, it is very important that they make use of local outdoor spaces for energetic physical play; this could be a park or sport grounds. When using these additional areas, it is important to have relevant risk assessments in place which are personalised to each cohort of children. Some pre-schools have an agreement to make use of a local primary school hall to provide energetic physical play sessions which works well. The guidance from the Health and Social Care Trust for voluntary/private settings requires that two staff are present at all times within each separate space that is used. This creates a challenge for leaders in deploying staff flexibly to utilise effectively all of the available outdoor spaces.

When outside, every muscle of the body is used so
gross and fine motor skills are being developed!
(Leader - voluntary playgroup)

Progression in physical development across the foundation stage is evident when the children are challenged to develop greater hand-eye co-ordination and to strengthen the flexibility of their hand and wrist motions as a prerequisite for good handwriting skills. A number of the foundation stage teachers prioritise this type of activity outdoors as an appropriate response to the regression in some of the children's handwriting skills during lockdown.



Foundation Stage staff work hard to maximise the use of the timetables for physical education by for example, having short timetabled PE sessions on arrival at school and staggering break and lunchtime times for energetic play.

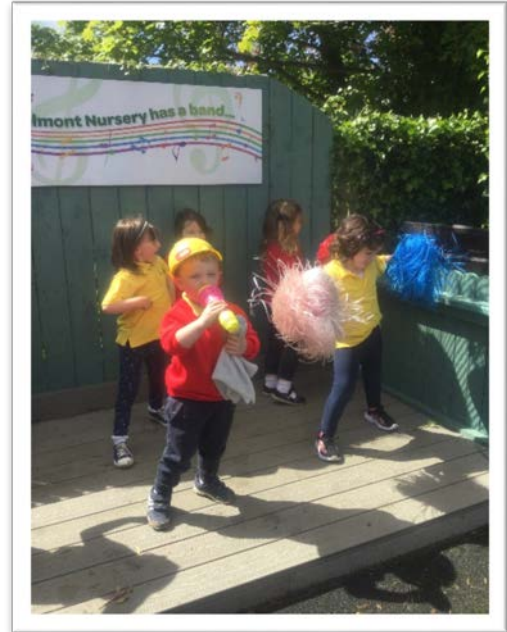
A majority of the primary schools visited have climbing frames or multi-activity centres which are effectively used to promote a wide range of gross motor skills involving climbing. In the best practice, the children are challenged and supported by staff to test their skills on the equipment, with appropriate consideration of risk. A significant minority of schools are improvising creatively to provide gross motor physical development opportunities with the provision of old tyres, planks of wood and ropes for the children to design and create obstacle courses on the grassy areas.

The Arts

Overall the engagement by children in the arts outdoors is less well-developed than the other areas of the curriculum in most of the settings visited. In particular, more could be done to plan regular singing with the children especially as restrictions had inhibited this very important aspect of the curriculum indoors.

In some settings the children have good opportunities to experiment with sound, rhythm and movement through the use of a range of musical instruments and music walls created with household items.

While not all settings have planned creative art activities outdoors, there are examples of painting on a larger scale such as, using a fence or a painting a plastic shower curtain with colours and spray bottles which can be easily cleaned afterwards. There are also good examples of opportunities for making temporary art creations using natural materials and larger scale model making using both commercial and junk materials.



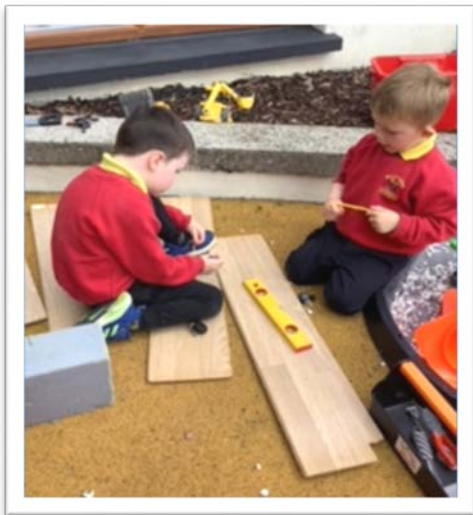
Progression in the Arts across the foundation stage classes is most evident in a minority of settings when the children use the materials to create increasingly complex models, persevere to overcome problems and make more detailed representations through their art work. This is facilitated well when a wide range of natural materials, such as grass, leaves, water, sticks and stones are available for them to use independently.

Where progression is less evident in the foundation stage, the children have only limited opportunities to develop close observation or drawing and writing skills with the creative use of a range of mixed media resources.

I have a supportive principal who lets me develop play
where I can consolidate literacy and numeracy skills.
(Foundation stage teacher)

Early Mathematical Experiences

In the settings visited, early mathematical experiences and the use of mathematical language is mostly integrated well into activities by the staff and matched closely to the children's stage of development. Examples include, wheeled toys numbered to correspond with parking spaces, counting and sorting during play and daily routines, measurement and shape in the construction areas and the use of positional language as children explore climbing equipment.



Progression in early mathematics across the foundation stage is most evident when the staff focus appropriately on reinforcing mathematical concepts and language in order to enhance the classroom-based mathematics lessons. Examples include counting balls in physical education lessons, weighing and measuring in role play, making comparisons in size and developing concepts about capacity in water play. The staff model and develop mathematical language and concepts, such as counting money, and the children use coins, add the total cost of items, can give change and also debate the reasons for 'dear and dearer' items. By year 2, the children can record their findings about the numbers of legs on centipedes and spiders and are able to handle simple data to record information about the variety of objects found on scavenger hunts.

Successes

- The creative, planned responses by most leaders to COVID-19 guidance in order to provide safe, secure and well-planned outdoor areas to enhance children's learning experiences and progression in learning outdoors.

- The children's enjoyment and sustained engagement in their learning through explorative play within the stimulating and well-presented outdoor areas in most of the settings visited.
- The wide range of opportunities being provided through outdoor learning, post-lockdown and remote learning, enabling children to re-connect with their friends and to play collaboratively.
- The recognition by leaders and staff of the benefits of outdoor learning to support the children to understand and manage their emotions and behaviours and improve well-being and concentration, including a majority of children identified with special educational needs.
- The holistic approaches to planning in almost all areas of the curriculum in pre-school and the cross-curricular links planned in the foundation stage to promote learning and the development of skills outdoors, in particular in the World Around Us.
- The positive impact on the delivery of important aspects of the curriculum including increased opportunities outdoors for the children to: engage in physical energetic play; develop their language and communication skills; make confident choices and decisions about their learning; and, to investigate the natural environment and take responsibility for its care.
- In the majority of the lessons observed in the foundation stage, teachers planned effective activities which were targeted successfully at developing and consolidating the children's key concepts and their literacy and numeracy skills.
- The access to additional funding streams through the DE and the EA which is being used well to enhance the quality, effectiveness and impact of outdoor learning environments.

Challenges and areas for development

- The impact of implementing COVID-19 safety measures, which result in reduced space or less time for outdoor play due to the necessary adjustments to timetables, zoning play areas and the need for staff to focus on necessary cleaning routines.
- The lack of additional staff training in pre-school settings and primary schools which is focused sharply on how to progress children's learning in outdoor environments.

- The lack of systematic and consistent approaches to monitoring and evaluating the quality of the learning and the benefits to children's health and well-being as a result of outdoor sessions.
- The challenges brought by inclement weather for those settings with no covered area or with a lack of suitable clothing for the children.
- The insufficient use made of the outdoors for planned storytelling and group singing in most settings.
- Limited planned opportunities for developing the Arts outdoors in most settings.
- Reduced number of educational trips and visitors from the local community to broaden children's experiences due to COVID-19 restrictions.
- The lack of suitable outdoor storage in a majority (64%) of the foundation stage classes which restricts the children's opportunities to access and select independently the materials they need to develop their play and also their responsibility in caring for the resources.

Conclusion

The leadership and staff in all settings are responding, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, with commitment, flexibility and success to meet the children's needs, through the development of creative and repurposed outdoor learning environments.

There is an increasing understanding of the importance and value of outdoor play across all phases within the early years' sector to promote young children's learning and development, resilience, health and a sense of well-being. Almost all areas of the early years' curricula are being delivered successfully through outdoor learning experiences.

The teaching staff have identified appropriately the need for continuous professional development and training, in particular for classroom assistants, to improve the quality of adult interaction and involvement in the children's play and to promote and sustain high quality learning.

While there has been a clear focus by leaders on developing the planning and provision for learning outdoors, the next step for all settings is to monitor and evaluate the quality of the outdoor provision and the impact on the children's learning, health and wellbeing.

While leaders have had to overcome a range of challenges in managing outdoor learning they are increasingly working to create a culture in which, *‘the development of outdoor learning environments is **in response to the positive impact on children’s learning experiences** and not just as a response to COVID-19.’* (Foundation stage teacher)

Appendix 1: Methodology/evidence base

Quantitative terms used by ETI

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75% - 90%
A majority	-	50% - 74%
A significant minority	-	30% - 49%
A minority	-	10% - 29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

ETI's Pre-school and Primary Inspection and Self-evaluation Framework publications are available on the ETI website:

Methodology

During May and June 2021, district inspectors from the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) visited a sample of 43 settings which are listed below. We are very grateful to these settings for their time, co-operation and participation. Online meetings were held with a sample of leaders from pre-schools and primary schools and information on the range of support and training available for the development of outdoor learning was provided by the Education Authority, the Controlled Schools Support Council, the Early Years Organisation, Independent Early Years Specialists and ALTRAM.

The visits focused on the:

- provision of space and resources for outdoor play;
- children's opportunities for connected curricular learning experiences; and
- staff and leaders' views about evaluation of the successes and challenges of managing learning and teaching in a COVID-19 safe environment.

Settings visited by ETI inspectors:

Voluntary Pre-schools

Ballyronan Playgroup
Benmore Playgroup
Eglinton Community Playgroup
Glenview Pre-school Centre
Little Oaks Playgroup
Naíscoil Charn Tóchair
Naíscoil Cholmcille
Naíscoil na Fuiseoige
Newtownabbey Methodist Mission Playgroup
Panda Cross Community Playgroup
Puddleducks Playgroup
Rainbow Community Childcare, Eglish
Straidarran Community Playgroup
St Mary's on the Hill
Sugar and Spice Early Year's Centre
The Magic Roundabout

Nursery Schools and Nursery Units

Banbridge Nursery School
Ballymoney Nursery School
Belmont Nursery School
Lisnagelvin Nursery School
Our Lady's Nursery School, Belfast
Railway Street Nursery School
Sunnylands Nursery School

Primary Schools

Ballymena Primary School
Naíscoil and Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche, Castlewellan
Eden Primary School
Edenderry Primary School
Gaelscoil Uí Néill and Naíscoil Uí Néill, Coalisland
Garryduff Primary School
Lisbellaw Primary School and Nursery Unit
Moat Primary School, Lisnaskea
Newtownbutler Primary School
Rathcoole Primary School and Nursery Unit
St Colman's Primary School, Lambeg
St John's Primary School,
St Joseph's Primary School, Donagh
St Mary's PS, Cushendall
St. Mary's Primary School, Maguiresbridge
St MacNissis Primary School, Larne
St. Ninnidh's Primary School, Derrylin
St Ronan's Primary School and Nursery Unit, Lisnaskea
St Tierney's Primary School, Roslea
Sunnylands Primary School

Appendix 2: Links to training and resources provided by support Bodies

School Development Service

The Supporting Learning website has two [video case studies](#) focusing upon pre-school settings and their use of outdoor learning.

A mature [outdoor natural space](#) has been enhanced and fully utilised to create a thriving space of conservation and outdoor learning – recognising the importance and value of children having regular access to nature.

The benefits of outdoor learning, maximising the use of [existing outdoor space](#) and using a piece of wasteland to create a garden oasis.

Supporting Learning website – [School Grounds – Taking the Learning Outdoors](#)

Department of Education

DE /NICS host play advice on the [NI Direct Website: Play Matters](#)

Playboard NI

[Play Matters](#)

[Taking Outdoor Play Seriously](#)

[Taking Outdoor Play Seriously - webinar](#)

[UNRC – The right to play](#)

CCEA

[Learning Outdoors in the Early Years](#)

[Learning through Play in Key stage 1](#)

[Learning through Play in the Early Years](#)

[Fundamental Movement Skills](#)

[Growing for the Future](#)

[The Outdoor Practitioner free e-Magazine](#)

CSSC

CSSC has signposted controlled schools to opportunities provided by the Northern Ireland Forest Schools Association and highlighted the experience of controlled schools in providing outdoor learning opportunities for pupils: [Rathcoole Primary School - Forest School is in session](#)

[Education Team explore Forest Schools](#)

[Case Study](#) on CSSC website highlighting outdoor learning at Dromore Nursery School and Sharon Beattie the Principal presented at our Effective practice seminar in 2018.

Altram

[Delivering the pre-school curriculum outdoors](#)

[COVID-19](#)

[Remote learning support](#)

[Outdoor play areas – design and create](#)

Getting Ready to Learn

[How Children Learn through Play](#)

[Play Scotland's Mucky Pups](#)

[Woodland Walks – Outdoor Play](#)

[20 Activities for 20 Days](#)

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