

Outdoor Learning Project 2023-2024 proposal v2

Our aims for Outdoor Learning at the Schools of Woolton Hill:

Here at Woolton Hill Juniors we are extremely fortunate to have a large outdoor space including our very own woodland. This area can be accessed jointly by both pupils from the Infant and Junior schools.

Through our outdoor learning curriculum we aim to provide all of the children within the federation the opportunity to learn outside of the classroom as much as possible.

Over recent years there has been a growing body of evidence that supports the value of the 'outdoors' in terms of children's development. Outdoor learning provides children with the space to move freely; movement along with play has been described as the most natural and powerful modes of learning for young children. The outdoors also has a huge positive impact on the health and mental wellbeing of children.

During our outdoor learning sessions children are encourage to work both independently and within a group to solve problems in a creative way, building important life skills in the process. These discreet outdoor learning activities are combined with other lessons within the curriculum to truly embrace the outdoors.

The EYFS outside area and the junior site is being developed as an environment for outdoor learning (there is limited scope for further improvements on the infant site) for the Federation. The infant school is already used to visiting the junior site for events so this is not a barrier to access.

Our Federation Improvement Plan has 5 key strategic aims and Outdoor Learning is one of them: see sidebar for details.

What we have done so far:

Extensive work has already been carried out to improve the outdoor learning environments in the EYFS and on the junior school site, including; the creation of the woodland walk to take children all the way through the woodlands area, creation of the fire circle outdoor area, hard standing area at the entrance to the woodlands, creation of bug hotels and the cleaning up of the existing outdoor hut.

Further works have also been done around the junior playground to provide other spaces for Outdoor Learning as well as to enjoy at break times.

Hampshire Outdoors team visited the junior site in July 2023 and met with Jo, Harriet, Kathryn and Paul. They carried out an audit with us of our existing provision and supported us with the next stages of site improvements and curriculum planning.

We have led a Federation staff meeting on Outdoor Learning to support staff with the



initial stages of getting children in every class learning outside more. Currently, staff are expected to use the outdoors to enhance the learning in other subjects e.g. taking their maths outside, doing a Stormbreak in the woods or using the outdoors to inspire writing etc. Jo is leading on the curriculum aspect of this project and, as part of the Staff Meeting, shared resources and planning for all year groups to use to support them in learning outside regularly.

We held a successful first Federation Outdoor Learning Day. This was very positively viewed by children, staff and visitors. The junior site was used by all children from EYFS - Year 6 and children were taught a number of outdoor learning skills such as den making.

What we need to do next:

Hold another Federation Outdoor Learning Day in spring and gather some pupil voice about these events.

A progressive skills based curriculum for Outdoor Learning needs to be developed for children from EYFS - Year 6. This will launch in September 2024 after which every class will have regular timetables slots for Outdoor Learning (when/who: Jo and Kathryn, with support of Hampshire Outdoors Team, summer term 2024).

Staff training so all teachers are confident to lead the teaching of the Outdoor Learning curriculum. This is booked in for INSET Day training in June 2024.

The Hampshire Audit raised a number of aspects which need to be developed in our outdoor areas to enable us to fully use the junior site to support an Outdoor Learning curriculum. These are:

- A dedicated outdoor learning 'classroom base' for learning and storage of teaching resources.
- Improve access to the existing woodland area.
- Creation of areas for den building and associated skills.
- Develop new and improve existing areas for planting/gardening.
- Develop areas to support Social and Emotional development for small groups of children.
- Encourage more wildlife through the creation of wild areas/grassed areas and more bird feeders/nest boxes.
- Develop the old pond area to re-establish a school pond and dipping platform.
- Improve access all year round through creating outdoor hand washing facilities and welly storage.
- Purchase of resources to supporting teaching e.g. tarps, collecting equipment, rope etc.

The following plan has therefore been put forward to address these areas of development and create suitable spaces ready for September 2024 when we aim for our Outdoor Learning Curriculum to be launched.

The Outdoor Learning Project 2023-2024 plan:

Funding streams

To fund this plan we aim to use schools Sports Premium Funding, existing PTA/Friends fund raising totals and new Federation Friends fund raising over 2023-24. Refer to attached excel document with breakdown of approx. costing for the project across these funding streams.

Plan of works

Risk management

Due to the nature of the funding streams, there is no guarantee if or when later stages may be completed.

For this reason, we need to ensure the project can support a meaningful volume of outdoor learning across the federation age groups after stage #1 is completed.

The outdoor facilities are key to the delivery of the outdoor curriculum so are planned first. To provide for storage, shelter and learning input space at this stage we can use both the existing Friendship hut and if required the LEAP building before renovating it.

This also buys time to reposition the nurture space elsewhere, saving costs when the LEAP is renovated later.

Stage #1: Development of the outdoor space, to include:

- Outdoor Welly storage for every classroom.
- External handwashing sink - connected to existing building.
- Wandering pathway from existing building into the existing woodlands area. This will have pergola style covering made from twisted sweet chestnut to allow cover and space to grow plants up and over.
- Creation of a dedicated den building area.
- Creation of a free standing mud kitchen, water play area and sensory barefoot walk - for small groups to access.

Stage #2: Development of the indoor space, to include:

- Renovation of existing building to create a dedicated space for an Outdoor Classroom.
- Create a Nurture Group Room with cooking facilities.

The Outdoor Learning space will be large enough for a class of 30 children to have a session input or return to draw/examine objects. It will be a learning space with tables and stools and have storage space for outdoor equipment/resources. The floor will be non-slip vinyl for easy cleaning.

The Nurture Room space will be large enough for groups of 6 children and 2 adults to come for Acorns Nurture sessions. These sessions are targeted to support children with social and emotional learning and the development of new skills in these areas. The room will be cosy and furnished to feel like an inviting safe space to come and learn.

Location

We plan to position the new outdoor facilities to the east of the existing LEAP building, until recently occupied by the pre-school team. Presently this is an unused grassy area adjacent to the woodland strip we have already developed.

We plan to re-use the LEAP building as the outdoor classroom and to start with this will also house the nurture space (this space has been set up for Nurture Groups to run since January 2024 and has so far impacted positively on groups of children from infants and juniors). It may be in future that we are able to move the Nurture Space to somewhere else in the Federation. If the nurture space is to be shared with the outdoor classroom we will at that point fit a sliding soundproof partition wall to divide the two spaces.

Vision/Inspiration wall



Possible nurture space?



Already developed woodland



Existing LEAP building

Position of sink



(Fence to be removed)

Area for mud kitchen, water play and barefoot/sensory walkway



Already developed woodland

Area for mud kitchen, water play and barefoot/sensory walkway

Area for dedicated den building structures



Durable, outdoor welly storage for each class

Direction of wandering pathway through grass to woodland path

