

Good Practice Guide

Making the Most of Your School Grounds



Swansea Environmental Education Forum
Fforum Addysg yr Amgylchedd Abertawe

"We believe that every young person should experience the world beyond the classroom as an essential part of learning and personal development, whatever their age, ability or circumstances."
Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto, DfES, 2006

Disclaimer

SEEF has produced this publication as a general guide to good practice – schools must take full responsibility for ensuring that all appropriate legal, and health and safety considerations are undertaken in the use and development of their school grounds.

SEEF has collected and provided information on the work of schools and other organisations in good faith and cannot be held responsible for changes in circumstances or misinformation.

SEEF does not vet, assess or endorse the organisations listed in this publication or the services and resources they provide.

FOREWORD

Over the last few years, SEEF and the Local Authority have seen an increase in the number of Swansea schools taking action to improve and make better use of their grounds for teaching and learning, and with this an increase in the demand for advice and support.

The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) 21st Century Schools Programme highlights the need to provide high quality, inspirational and sustainable environments, both internally and in the spaces around schools, including better design and use of school grounds for teaching, learning, health and wellbeing. Within Swansea there are many examples of good practice but also considerable opportunities for further developments.

SEEF believes that every child should leave school with a thorough understanding of environmental issues and feeling inspired and empowered to actively care for and improve their environment. Well developed and used school grounds can significantly contribute to this aim by providing meaningful contact with the natural environment and hands on experiences of sustainability in action.

We hope this guidance document, together with the directory of local support, will provide inspiration and useful information to help all schools in Swansea to make more effective and sustainable use of their outdoor areas.

Deb Hill, Chair of Swansea Environmental Education Forum

What is SEEF?

Swansea Environmental Education Forum (SEEF) was set up in February 1999 as a network of individuals and organisations committed to improving the quality of Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) throughout the Swansea area.

SEEF members offer a wealth of knowledge, skills and experience and offer a variety of services, resources and activities for schools, youth groups, the general public and other organisations.

SEEF has published several resources for schools, organised a series of teachers' conferences and maintains an informative and interactive website. In 2008, SEEF launched the Swansea Sustainable Schools Scheme (4S's) to help schools attain high standards in the delivery of ESDGC through their curriculum and management. Several schools have been awarded for their progress in the scheme.

For more information visit www.seeforum.org.uk or contact the SEEF coordinator at the Environment Centre, Swansea. Tel: 01792 480200 Email: education@environmentcentre.org.uk

Good Practice Guide: Making the Most of Your School Grounds (March 2011) is published by Swansea Environmental Education Forum with support from the City and County of Swansea, Countryside Council for Wales and the Millennium Stadium Trust.



Swansea Environmental Education Forum
Fforum Addysg yr Amgylchedd Abertawe

PURPOSE AND LAYOUT OF THIS GUIDE

This latest resource from SEEF is designed to be a best practice guide to provide inspiration, information and practical advice to help schools apply an effective approach to developing and enhancing their grounds. The focus is on the natural environment, creative design and sustainability but reference is also made to the full breadth of uses and benefits of well developed school grounds. This guide has been written specifically for schools in Swansea although most of the principles and ideas it contains may be of interest to schools outside the area. A copy of the guide is available on the SEEF website and sections will be updated from time to time.

The guide is split into 5 sections to help readers easily find the help they are looking for.

Part 1 provides the context for school grounds development and explains why school grounds should be viewed as an important asset to support learning and wider benefits.

- Benefits to teaching and learning page 6
- Benefits to the school and community page 11
- Benefits to the environment and biodiversity page 12
- Overcoming barriers to using the school grounds page 13

Part 2 looks at the process of developing school grounds – how to do it well and how to overcome barriers such as concern about health and safety or vandalism.

- Top tips for successful school grounds development projects page 15
- The LTL 4-stage process of change page 17
- Overcoming barriers to developing the school grounds page 18

Part 3 offers a wide range of practical ideas for enhancing school grounds and creating spaces for nature, play and learning, with lots of local examples.

- Spaces for nature page 19
- Spaces for growing and farming page 26
- Spaces for structures and being creative page 30
- Spaces for play and being active page 34



Part 4 presents a selection of local case studies that demonstrate what can be achieved, with tips for how to go about it successfully.

- Bishopston Primary School page 36
- Cila Primary School page 38
- Craigfelen Primary School page 40
- Waunarlwydd Primary School page 42
- Ynystawe Primary School page 44
- Bishopston Comprehensive School page 46

Part 5 outlines where schools can find funding, useful resources and support, including advice, training and practical help from local organisations.

- Finding funding and resources for school grounds projects page 48
- Useful publications and websites page 50
- Directory of support for school grounds development and use page 50



Acknowledgements

SEEF would like to acknowledge the valuable advice and support of many organisations and individuals who helped in compiling this guide, including each of the schools that contributed the case study information and/or photographs to illustrate the brilliant work they are doing.

SEEF is especially grateful to Learning through Landscapes and Cheshire County Council for generously sharing their resources and allowing us to use some of their ideas.

Thanks also go to SEEF members who provided information and inspiration, in particular, the Nature Conservation Team, the Down to Earth Project and the National Botanic Garden of Wales for their great support and guidance, and PMDevelopments for preparing the guide.

PART 1: WHY SCHOOL GROUNDS ARE IMPORTANT

This section explains why the school grounds should be viewed as an important asset and may help you to encourage other staff, governors and parents to allocate more time and resources into using and developing them.

It has been estimated that on average about 60% of the school estate is made up of outside space, rather than buildings, and that children spend up to 25% of each school day in their school grounds. Whilst care is often taken to ensure that the indoor environment is stimulating and well managed, the full potential of outside areas is often not fully recognised or utilised.

“School grounds are a valuable resource and have a significant effect on the ethos of the school and the quality of education pupils receive.”

Building Bulletin 98 (Secondary) and Building Bulletin 99 (Primary)

If school grounds are imaginatively designed, purposefully used and well-maintained, they can have a significant, positive impact on pupil behaviour, development and learning. The 2003 National School Grounds Survey, conducted by Learning through Landscapes, found that 65% of schools reported improved attitudes to learning as a consequence of school grounds development. A majority also reported that social interaction (84%) and pupil behaviour (75%) had improved, bullying incidences had reduced (64%) and the number of lessons being taught outside had increased (65%).

At a time when local authorities across the country have to reduce costs and consider selling some of their assets, schools need to be able to demonstrate the important contribution that their grounds make to education and pupil development, the wider community and the environment. It is crucial that any school grounds development projects are discussed with the local education authority before work is started and that long term maintenance is carefully considered.

The introduction of the Foundation Phase in Wales has placed renewed emphasis on the use of the outdoors for the education and development of young children. However, using and enhancing school grounds can bring extensive benefits to teaching and learning across all ages plus wider benefits to the school, the community and the environment.

Benefits to teaching and learning

Providing pupils with first hand experience of the world around them can bring the curriculum to life. Children are often more engaged when learning outdoors, particularly those that find classroom work and concentration challenging. Outdoor activities can support emotional, social and physical development. School grounds not only play an essential role in delivering aspects of the formal curriculum but play a significant role in informal learning and the hidden curriculum, and can help the school in its efforts to embed Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC).

Teachers can also find working outdoors rewarding and will often be inspired to access a wider range of resources and to use a wider variety of teaching styles. Developing a rich variety of spaces and interesting features in the schools grounds can provide enormous opportunities for teaching in ways that are not possible in the classroom. For example, activities that are noisy or messy may be easier to do outdoors where there is greater space and freedom. School grounds improvement projects also offer a great context for developing a wide range of problem solving and practical skills.

Formal curriculum

Whilst the opportunities for teaching PE, geography, science and art in the school grounds may be fairly obvious, school grounds can be used to enhance the teaching of all curriculum subjects. Here are just a few examples of activities that can be undertaken in each of the main curriculum areas:



PE: Many school grounds, particularly in the secondary sector, include marked areas for team sports but additional provision to support physical education can be developed, such as orienteering courses, climbing walls or exercise trails.

Science: Working outdoors throughout the year, pupils can experience and explore the seasons, weather and natural cycles. School grounds can offer a variety of different habitats that can be studied and compared and help pupils learn about adaptation and food webs. The outdoors gives more space to explore forces, movement, sound and light, and offers practical examples of the use and properties of different materials.

Geography: Though the school grounds can never replace the experience of fieldwork beyond the school, they do offer a great location to learn and practice field study skills without the costs and other constraints associated with off-site activities. Gaining confidence and competence in map work, surveying and other geographical skills, within the relative safety of the school environs, will help pupils and teachers to get the most out of field trips to sites further afield.

Art: A well developed school environment can provide a stimulus for observational drawing and the exploration of colour, shape and texture. The natural environment can provide materials for use in collages and 3-D structures. Art projects can create temporary or permanent features for the school grounds such as murals, mosaics and sculptures, sometimes involving local artists or the wider community.



History: Most schools have features in their grounds and buildings that reflect a past stretching over decades and illustrate changes in school life and the wider community. Pupils can develop trails for peers or visitors that highlight and interpret these features. Art projects can provide murals, sculptures or other features in the school grounds that focus on aspects of the local heritage and can support Curriculum Cymreig.

Mathematics: The natural and built environment around schools provide lots of opportunities for applying mathematical skills in a practical context including shape recognition, pattern, measurement, estimation, frequency, data collection and presentation, and even budgeting for improvement projects.

Language: Literacy, language and communication skills can be developed effectively outdoors. The natural environment provides children with opportunities to use scientific and descriptive language, and to develop writing through mark making, and can also be a great inspiration for creative work. Log circles, outdoor classrooms and amphitheatres can be great settings for story-telling, circle time and performance.



Gors Primary School

DT: School grounds improvement projects, and on-going maintenance, can provide many opportunities for design activities such as developing proposals for new features, investigating the properties of materials and promoting events and activities.

IT / ICT: Digital cameras, sound recorders, PDAs (personal digital assistants), remote sensors and other data collection equipment can be used in the school grounds to develop IT skills or to support other curricular areas. Pupils can use a variety of computer applications to analyse survey data and produce promotional materials for grounds improvement projects and use the Internet to research ideas.

RE: Appreciation of and caring for the natural environment is a core theme running throughout the agreed syllabus for RE in Swansea. The faiths, traditions and cultures of pupils within the school, or partner schools in other countries, may be reflected in structures, designs and features within the school grounds.

PSE / ESGC: The development and use of the school grounds provides great opportunities for pupils to explore values, rights, responsibilities and equality issues. Pupils can undertake environmental audits and user surveys in preparation for school grounds enhancements and explore design ideas and features considering safety, shade, health, fitness, biodiversity and the use of sustainable materials. Thoughtfully designed and quiet outside spaces may provide a suitable setting for discussing sensitive PSE themes in a relaxed way.

Music: The outdoors is a great place to make a noise without unnecessarily disturbing neighbouring classrooms. Outdoor performance spaces can be constructed for lessons or school events. Sound gardens can be created, particularly for younger children or pupils with special educational needs, for informal and structured play.



Cila Primary School

School Grounds and Foundation Phase

The Foundation Phase in Wales promotes a holistic, experiential and skills focussed approach to education – learning outdoors is integral to this.

“The Foundation Phase environment should promote discovery and independence and a greater emphasis on using the outdoor environment as a resource for children’s learning.”

Framework for Children’s Learning for 3 to 7-year-olds in Wales (2008)

Many of the curriculum examples given above can be applied or adapted to the seven areas of learning and the information provided later in this guide will help Foundation Phase practitioners to develop their outside spaces.

Learning through Landscapes Cymru recently published a comprehensive guide – “**First Steps Outdoors**” – designed specifically for Foundation Phase settings in Wales. It provides advice, case studies and photocopyable resources, and is available from the LTL Cymru website (www.ltl.org.uk/wales/index.php).

Informal and hidden curriculum

The informal and hidden curriculums have a significant influence on education and child development. The informal curriculum includes playtimes, lunchtime clubs and after school activities such as sport, concerts, etc. The hidden curriculum generally refers to the ethos of the school, including the behaviour and attitudes of staff and pupils, and the way the school is designed, the materials used, and how it is developed and maintained.



In recent years, there have been several initiatives in Wales aiming to improve the health, fitness and well being of children and young people, such as the Healthy Schools Scheme, the Climbing Higher Strategy and the Creating an Active Wales action plan, which all promote regular physical activity. These initiatives can be supported by clubs and activities that take place in school grounds e.g. gardening clubs, use of adventure play equipment.

Active play during lessons and break times have obvious benefits for children’s health and physical

development but it has also been shown that children who are active at playtime return to their lessons revitalised and ready to learn.

Dinner ladies and teaching assistants can be trained to support structured play during break times to avoid pupil boredom and disruptive behaviour. Play may be less of a feature in secondary schools but the social aspects of the school grounds remain important and break times still provide a useful opportunity for young people to engage with their environment and with each other. Quiet and sheltered outside areas, which may include seating, planting, artwork and innovative design, can provide pupils with opportunities to develop their communication and social skills.

Outdoor activities, whether during lessons or outside school times, are often well suited to collaborative learning, enabling children to work together, to problem solve and to build confidence, self-esteem, responsibility and independence – principles of the Forest School approach for which many local teachers and support staff have been trained.

There is growing evidence that contact with natural environments benefit physical, psychological and emotional health. However, it is widely acknowledged that children now spend much less time playing in natural places, such as woodlands and open countryside, than twenty or thirty years ago. A report on how different generations interact with nature, published by Natural England in 2009, found that less than 10% of children play in such places compared to 40% of adults when they were young.



Evolutionary psychologists suggest that humans have a natural affinity towards nature and the outdoors, sometimes referred to as biophilia, and that engaging with the natural environment engenders a sense of well-being, reduces stress and improves creativity. If opportunities to develop this natural instinct are not promoted and supported in early development then an aversion to nature, biophobia, may develop. This can result in a feeling of discomfort in natural places and a view of the natural world as alien and simply a disposable resource.

School grounds can offer a safe place for children to explore and develop their understanding of the natural environment, and increase a sense of connection to and empathy with nature.

The standard of design and the maintenance of the school grounds can strongly influence how pupils and staff view their school experience. School grounds improvement projects, particularly where the whole school and the wider community have an involvement, can engender pride and a sense of place, whilst decreasing the risks and impacts of vandalism and littering.



Vocational training

Many secondary schools have now extended their curriculum to include a programme of vocational courses. School grounds development, use and maintenance projects can support a variety of qualifications in areas such as construction, land management, horticulture and conservation skills. School grounds improvement projects can also offer practical activities for pupils in Learning Support Units and on alternative curriculum programmes.

Benefits to the school and community

Making a good impression to visitors, especially prospective parents and pupils, is important to schools. The first view that visitors have of a school is the outside space; how the grounds are being used and whether they are developed and well maintained can suggest a lot about the values and ethos of the school.



School grounds development projects provide a great way of engaging pupils, parents and the community in taking an interest in and caring for the school and the wider environment. If developed and managed appropriately, the grounds can also offer a useful resource for community activities and events.

Grounds improvements and a good grounds maintenance regime can also contribute to obtaining awards such as Eco-Schools, the Swansea Sustainable Schools Scheme and Swansea in Bloom.

Swansea Sustainable Schools Scheme (4S's)

The 4S's scheme, launched by SEEF in 2008, is designed to provide schools in Swansea with encouragement and support to move forward with ESGC and to attain high standards by embedding ESGC in their curriculum and through the way they manage their buildings and grounds.

Schools are challenged to meet specific criteria set out for three different levels – bronze, silver and gold – across eight themes, including grounds & buildings, food & farming, and biodiversity. Schools that can demonstrate they have reached the standards are eligible for an award in recognition of their achievements.

For example, the bronze level for the grounds & buildings theme expects a school grounds survey to have been undertaken and for an action plan to be produced. At the silver level, schools are required to be using the grounds regularly throughout the year with all age groups and across several curriculum areas. To achieve the gold standard, an annual grounds management plan must be in place and funding identified in the annual school budget for grounds maintenance.

For a full list of criteria at each level, schools must refer to the scheme document. Copies have been provided to each school in Swansea but can also be downloaded from the SEEF website – a limited number of hard copies are also still available.



Swansea Sustainable Schools Scheme

Benefits to the environment and biodiversity

How a school develops and maintains its grounds can demonstrate its commitment to the environment, sustainability and ESDGC – how it keeps control of litter, the materials it chooses for construction projects, how it interacts with the natural environment and whether it supports and enhances biodiversity.

School Grounds can provide valuable havens for wildlife. Since the introduction of the 2006 NERC Act (see below) all public bodies, including schools, have a statutory duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

Many school grounds already contain a variety of habitats and species or have the potential to create new nature areas, and it is important to find out what is already there before developing new plans.



Bishopston Primary School

School grounds can sustain a wide range of species and can play an important role as part of the network of green spaces acting as valuable stepping stones which help to increase connectivity by enabling species to migrate between sites. Even in the smallest, inner city school, wildlife areas can be created to provide important natural resources e.g. installing planters, barrel ponds, bird-feeders, nest-boxes and invertebrate homes.

In addition to supporting biodiversity, natural open spaces in and around schools can provide a range of other functions, termed 'ecosystem services', which can have important environmental benefits beyond the school. These ecosystem services include: nutrient and water recycling; flood prevention through sustainable urban drainage; climate change mitigation through provision of shade and micro climate regulation; absorption of noise, CO₂ and air pollution; provision of food and fuel (biomass); and, where accessible to others, opportunities for recreation, exercise, relaxation and inspiration.

School Grounds and Environmental Regulations

- The 1981 **Wildlife and Countryside Act** protects wildlife from developments and prohibits activities that could impact on protected species e.g. trimming hedges during the bird nesting period, or disturbing roosting bats.
- The 1990 **Environmental Protection Act** places a duty on all state funded schools to ensure their grounds are kept free from litter.
- The 2006 **Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC)** places a duty on public bodies to ensure their activities have due regard for conserving biodiversity.

Overcoming barriers to using the school grounds

Health and safety concerns

It is unquestionable that schools have a duty of care for their pupils and that health and safety should always be a high priority. Identifying potential dangers and removing unnecessary risk is an important aspect of education provision whether indoors or outdoors. However, this should be carefully balanced with the benefits associated with allowing children and young people the freedom to develop independence and the skills they need to keep themselves safe from harm. Children need to learn how to assess situations and make choices, as they grow up and develop. They should be given opportunities to challenge themselves, to test their limits and to learn how to manage risks for themselves.

School grounds can be designed to support a good range of challenging activities for children of differing abilities, in a well-managed environment.



It is essential that this balanced approach to health and safety is developed with the support and involvement of parents, Governors and others and that it is clearly communicated through health and safety policy statements and risk assessment procedures. Keeping the school grounds free of unacceptable hazards such as broken glass, animal faeces and sharps should become part of a regular routine.



Poor weather

It can sometimes be easy for staff, parents or pupils to suggest it is too rainy, too cold, too warm, too sunny, too icy, too wet or too windy to go outside. However, weather conditions should rarely be seen as a problem for outdoor education – instead, the focus should be on ensuring suitable clothing and footwear is worn and that appropriate shade or shelter is available. Schools that value and promote outdoor learning invest in, or fundraise for weatherproof clothing and a supply of umbrellas, boots, sun hats, etc.

Studying the seasons and experiencing the elements should be an important part of the learning experience, particularly for younger children. In Foundation Phase, it is becoming common place for children to be able to flow freely between the indoors and outdoors with a covered transition zone provided for them to have easy access to coats and boots, if needed. Whilst some activities may be restricted in an outdoor setting, many activities can take place successfully in most weather conditions.

The value of outdoor education in all weathers should be explained to parents who may be asked to provide a change of clothing either on a regular basis for young children, or on specific occasions for older pupils.

Lack of time

If a school accepts that teaching pupils outdoors is a valuable, if not essential, component of its educational provision, and the school grounds are viewed as an important asset, then spending time in the school grounds should become a regular feature of lesson timetables, curriculum plans and the school development plan.

Pupil behaviour

Learning through Landscapes suggests that there is little difference between managing pupil behaviour outdoors or indoors, and provide the following checklist that they have developed through their training and resources:

- Plan for success. Make the activities manageable, relevant and fun.
- Negotiate roles based on class rules and school policy.
- Gather equipment well in advance and decide on the best way to take it outside.
- Share objectives, outcomes, boundaries and expectations.
- Ensure smooth, calm transitions from indoors to outdoors
- Establish a gathering point.
- Agree a signal for calling the children back.
- Keep tasks focused and fun.
- Gather children regularly to praise and re-establish tasks and expectations.
- Reflect on the session, share success and consider ways forward.

(Reproduced with kind permission from Learning through Landscapes)



“There is an increasing body of evidence which clearly demonstrates the benefits for young people’s learning and personal development outside the classroom.”

Learning Outside the Classroom website

PART 2: HOW TO DEVELOP YOUR SCHOOL GROUNDS

This section provides useful tips on how to approach school grounds development projects and address concerns that may hinder progress.

Top tips for successful school grounds development projects

Many factors determine whether or not a school grounds development project will be successful and sustainable (both environmental and in terms of longevity). Here are seven top tips to consider:

1. The lay of the land

Conduct a site survey to find out what already exists so you can take advantage of landscape features and ensure you don't destroy important wildlife habitats or species. Surveying offers a valuable learning experience for pupils and can easily be integrated into the curriculum. There are several local sources of help for biodiversity surveys. You



Bishopston Comprehensive School

must also find out where underground services and potential land contamination might be and whether there are any legal restrictions on the use of the site e.g. rights of way, protected habitats – the local authority should be consulted at the very start of any school grounds development project and will be able to help with most of these issues.



Bishopston Primary School

2. Canvassing opinions

Ask pupils, staff and the wider community how they currently use the grounds and how they would like to use them. This may include ideas for new features they would like to see but it is more important to capture how people feel about the school grounds and what improvements they would like to see. It is unlikely that everybody's specific suggestions can be incorporated into the plans or implemented in the short term but key priorities and needs will probably

emerge and by capturing a wide range of ideas, it is more likely that imaginative improvements will be found. Involving pupils and others in the local community will promote a strong sense of shared ownership and reduce the risk of vandalism.

3. Devising a master plan

Develop a clear vision of what you want to achieve in the longer term with an outline plan for the whole grounds. This plan can be broken down into manageable phases and zones, and should also be flexible so that new ideas, needs and opportunities can be accommodated. A landscape architect or artist may be useful at this stage to prepare an inspirational design that enthuses everyone and helps attract funding and support. It might be useful to visit other schools to get ideas and to learn from their experiences.

4. All aboard

Gaining the support and involvement of pupils, staff, Governors, parents and the wider community at each stage of a school grounds development project is crucial if there is to be a broad sense of ownership and if the new features are to be well used. It can also avoid responsibility for school grounds improvement and maintenance falling on the shoulders of just a few people. The support of the local authority is also crucial.

5. Attention to detail

Individual features or phases of improvement should be planned in detail to avoid problems during or after development. Careful consideration of cost, materials, time and space, health and safety, access and maintenance is important. Investing in good quality materials and durable construction methods may result in lower maintenance costs. If you are planning to build a permanent or fixed structure, check whether planning permission is required. Whether using pupils, volunteers, contractors or a mix of these to do the work, a clear brief should be prepared and essential issues such as insurance, risk management and child protection should be addressed.



6. In for the long haul

Preparing and implementing a management plan to ensure the grounds are maintained effectively is essential if the investment of pupils, colleagues, parents and funders is not to be wasted. The local authority's grounds staff and local groups may be able to help. It is important that school grounds maintenance and continued improvement is included in the school development plan and it may be necessary to organise staff training to ensure that the grounds are used to their full potential.



7. For the record

To sustain interest in the school grounds, celebration events can be organised to mark the creation of new features or completion of phases of the plans, and involve the press, parents and the community. Maintain a photographic record of any improvements as these can help you to attract support for further work or win awards for your work: before and after pictures can be particularly useful.

The LTL 4-stage process of change

Learning through Landscapes (LTL), the leading UK charity for outdoor learning and play, has developed a 4-stage 'process of change' to help schools use their resources effectively, and ensure that development projects meet the needs of the school.



Reproduced with kind permission from Learning through Landscapes

By the end of the first stage you should have a good knowledge of: the existing layout and features of your school grounds; how the grounds are maintained and whether they are in good condition; how the grounds are viewed by the whole school community; and of any technical and legal constraints that exist.

By the end of the second stage you should have a vision plan showing what you would like to achieve; how you would like your grounds to function; and how you would like to be able to use them.

By the end of the third stage you should have detailed plans for the immediate changes you hope to make. You should have considered the maintenance implications.

By the end of the fourth stage you should have improved your grounds, and be ready to think about future projects.

More details on this process are provided in LTL resources – see page 50.

Overcoming barriers to developing the school grounds

Lack of space

Even the smallest school grounds can be improved to offer a wide range of resources and opportunities to enhance learning and play. Where existing space is inadequate to accommodate all that a school wants to do outdoors, then opportunities outside the school boundaries should be explored e.g. a local park or a nearby open green space could be used for sports and active play, or could be adopted, with permission from the land owners, as a wildlife area or a place for growing. Schools within easy walking distance and with different outdoor resources could share their facilities e.g. one school could use the other's sports field once a week in exchange for access to their wildlife area.

Lack of funding

Many simple, but nonetheless significant, improvements can be made with very little or no funding. Volunteer help from within and beyond the school, and donations of materials from parents and local businesses and groups, can help to make a start.

Fundraising events can be used not only to bring in initial funding but to engage the whole school and wider community. If a school can demonstrate that it has a clear vision for what it wants to achieve, and has proved a willingness to give time and energy, then funders are very likely to provide support for more ambitious projects.

Risk of vandalism

The risk of vandalism is often cited as a barrier to making improvements to the school grounds but where grounds have been developed and are well used, welcoming and well maintained, this is very rarely the experience. Engaging pupils and the wider community in development projects will increase a sense of pride and ownership and drastically reduce the risk, as will allowing the grounds facilities to be used outside of school time.

Lack of expertise

There are many experienced professionals and useful resources readily available to help schools explore and implement improvements to their school grounds and to make the most of what they have or might develop. Voluntary sector organisations and business enterprises will sometimes charge for their services but help may be available free-of-charge from council officers, and there may be parents or local community members with expertise that they are willing to donate. In order to ensure that school staff can manage development projects and maintain new features in the school grounds, training may be appropriate. Several local and national organisations (including SEEF) organise INSET programmes which include training on various aspects of school grounds use and development, and some are able to come into school to speak to the whole staff, to Governors, pupils, parents, etc. in twilight sessions.



PART 3: WHAT TO INCLUDE IN THE SCHOOL GROUNDS

This section offers a wide range of practical ideas for enhancing school grounds and creating spaces for nature, play and learning.

The school grounds should include a good mix of features and facilities that meet a variety of needs and serve the whole school community. The 21st Century Schools Information Document, published by WAG in May 2010, suggests that young people aspire to have “school grounds with places to play, work, study, and relax.”

The Building Bulletins 98 and 99 set standards for the quantity of outside space that should be available in schools, correlated to the number of pupils on roll, and makes recommendations on the types of space that should be included. In addition to outdoor PE facilities, the guidance suggests:

“A variety of informal and social areas should be created to suit the learning development and cultural needs of pupils during breaks and before and after school, and for a range of formal curriculum needs.”

Building Bulletin 98 (Secondary) and Building Bulletin 99 (Primary)

Information and ideas about many different features and areas that could be developed in the school grounds are arranged below under five main headings. Overlaps exist between these sections e.g. most features in the first section can also contribute to play or creativity.

Spaces for nature

“Habitat areas can include a range of outdoor classroom spaces and designs and are a valuable resource for teaching and learning across the whole curriculum. They can help children’s emotional, social and cultural development. They are also important for involving pupils in the life and management of the school.”

Building Bulletin 98 (Secondary) and Building Bulletin 99 (Primary)



Extending the range of habitats or enhancing existing habitats in the school grounds can increase the opportunities for pupils to see wildlife and interact with the natural world, can contribute to the aesthetics of the school surroundings and can bring a wide range of educational, environmental and community benefits.

Large trees and water habitats, for example, not only play an important role in supporting a huge number of different species but also have a special place in heritage and culture, offer great opportunities for practical science, geography and maths work, provide great locations for storytelling and discussion, and can be a wonderful stimulus for imaginative and exploratory play.

Wildlife areas can be easy and cheap to create and maintain – even leaving an unused area to grow wild can be beneficial to nature and provide an interesting learning resource. Developing areas for nature can actually save money in the long run too e.g. wildflower meadows only need mowing once or twice a year and can reduce the cost of annual grass cutting contracts, and hedges can be much cheaper to maintain than wooden or metal fences, or boundary walls.



Casllwchwr Primary School

Trees, woodlands and hedgerows

Planting and preserving trees and hedgerows in school grounds can bring many benefits – providing shelter from the wind and shade from the sun; strengthening boundaries and separating or screening off areas; reducing noise pollution; adding attractive features and enhancing the local landscape; creating important habitats and corridors or ‘highways’ for wildlife; and offering a wide range of educational opportunities.



Bishopston Primary School

Woodland areas are great for seating, picnic areas, den building, log circles and Forest School activities, and ideal for bulb planting, building log or stone piles, installing bird boxes, etc. Fallen and decaying wood is very important for wildlife and should be retained in the woodland area to support insects, fungi, mosses and lichens.

When planting trees or shrubs, it is important to choose the right type and size of plants for the purpose and location. Different plants are suited to different soil conditions (pH and dampness) and levels of exposure. Choosing native species, wherever possible, will help to support more wildlife. Trees and plants that have poisonous leaves or fruit should be avoided. Consider how tall the trees are likely to grow and the impact they will eventually have on the surrounding area e.g. shade, leaves falling, the impact of roots, and the maintenance costs.

Planting clusters of native trees or extending an existing woodland area, whether within or outside the school grounds, will be of greater value to wildlife than planting just a few separate trees or non-native species – though these may also have their uses.

Here are a few important things to consider when choosing a site for planting trees:

- avoid planting large trees too close to buildings or paths as the roots can cause damage
- avoid overhead cables, underground services, drains, lighting, CCTV cameras, road signs, etc.
- avoid planting trees near ponds as falling leaves may clog them and add to maintenance
- avoid planting trees close to paths and parking areas if they bear fruit or have large leaves as this could create a slipping hazard
- avoid planting saplings in areas prone to vandalism or where they could be damaged by grounds maintenance work e.g. mowing and strimming

Hedgerows can be very useful for marking boundaries and separating areas of the school grounds that are used for different purposes e.g. running around, sitting quietly or observing wildlife. The best hedgerows for studying and for supporting wildlife have a variety of species including shrubs that flower and fruit at different times, and wildflowers at their base. Hedges can provide protected corridors to enable wildlife to travel between habitats and to food sources e.g. from a woodland area to a pond.

New trees and hedgerows may require some management in the first year or two e.g. mulching around the base to reduce weeds and grass; using tree guards or mesh to protect the trunks from rabbits; using stakes to provide support; and watering from time to time until the roots are established.

Hedgerows can be pruned to maintain the desired height and shape, and hazel or willow can be coppiced (cut back) to encourage bushy growth, and encourage a wider range of wildlife. An annual safety inspection of larger and more mature trees should be undertaken and advice and help should always be sought if maintenance is necessary.



Bishopston Primary School

Further information and resources

The **Woodland Trust** (www.woodlandtrust.org.uk) offer information and advice on creating and using woodlands and offer a range of free tree packs for planting copses and hedges. **Coeden Fach Tree Nursery**, in Bishopston, supply trees for school grounds and donate a number of trees to one local school each year. **The Tree Council** have a trees for schools grant scheme and offer a free Tree Ties CD resource with activity sheets (www.treecouncil.org.uk/grants/trees-for-schools). The **Countryside Council for Wales** supply posters, information sheets and other resources for schools and can advice on biodiversity issues (www.ccw.gov.uk).

Ponds and wetland habitats

Ponds and wetlands habitats, such as bogs, marshes and reedbeds, have become uncommon in Wales and the rest of the UK, as a result of centuries of land drainage and development. These habitats, which are relatively easy to create, can be rich in biodiversity and support a wide range of wildlife species that live in, feed in or visit them. They also provide great opportunities for children to experience nature and study life cycles, food webs and adaptation.



When creating a pond or wetland habitat, it is important to think carefully about where it is sited. Here are a few important things to consider:

- how will it be topped up e.g. by a stream or drain, or from surface run-off
- what will happen to overflow e.g. will it flood a path or feed into a wildlife bog
- will it be located away from underground services and drains, and sources of pollution e.g. run-off from the school car park
- is the site visible and easy to access from the school, for constant supervision
- can its outline be clearly defined to avoid people walking into it by mistake
- will there be easy access for educational activities and for maintenance such as a firm surface along one edge or a dipping platform
- will it be linked to other habitats to provide access and cover for visiting wildlife
- will it be a sheltered, sunny location, with some shade, and away from large trees which may cause the pond to clog up with leaves
- advice should always be sought from the local authority on the siting and construction of ponds or wetland areas, and associated health and safety issues.



A mix of plants to provide oxygen, shelter, food, etc. can be introduced but be sure not to introduce alien species. Creatures should be allowed to come in naturally, rather than importing them from other ponds, as this may result in the transfer of diseases or undesirable plants. Ensure there is a sloping side to the pond to enable creatures to escape.

If a pond is established in the right location and in the right way, maintenance can be easy. Surface plants may need to be

cleared from time to time to ensure sunlight and oxygen levels are maintained and plants around the pond edge may need to be thinned. Cleared vegetation should be left at the side of the pond for a few days to allow pond creatures to return to the water. Ponds may also require an occasional top-up but this should be done using rainwater e.g. collected in a water butt, if possible, rather than tap water.

An alternative to creating a natural, ground-level pond, is to construct a raised pond or develop a water habitat in a trough or barrel. These may not be as attractive to wildlife but can be more accessible to pupils of all abilities. Bogs or marshy areas can support an interesting and diverse range of plants and animals and may offer an alternative or addition to a pond whether created in an area of the school fields or in a container.



Further information and resources

Useful information and resources on creating and maintaining ponds are provided by both **Pond Conservation** (www.pondconservation.org.uk) and the **British Ecological Society** (www.britishecologicalsociety.org/educational). **Forestry Commission Wales** has published an advice guide on ponds in school grounds (search for ponds in their online library, www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/library). **RoSPA** have produced information sheets on safety associated with ponds and pond dipping (www.rospa.com/leisuresafety/adviceandinformation/watersafety). The Council **Nature Conservation Team** offer advice on a range of issues relating to biodiversity and wildlife areas (www.swansea.gov.uk/natureconservationteam).

Other habitats and areas for wildlife

Meadows have become rare in the UK, particularly as a result of more intensive farming methods. They are a mix of grasses and wildflowers and can provide cover and an important source of food for invertebrates, birds and mammals. Different types of grassland require slightly different soil and weather conditions but most like fairly poor soil as it enables wildflowers to compete better with the grasses.

A meadow can be created in and around schools of all sizes e.g. in a flowerbed, on a grass verge or around playing fields. Ideally, a meadow would be sited in a sunny location that won't get trampled too much, particularly during the flowering season. Depending on soil type and the range of plants that emerge, or are sown, the meadow should be managed for either spring or summer flowering. A spring meadow, which is usually more suited to the school year, should be mowed once after the flowers have seeded and then again in the autumn. Summer meadows should also be mowed in the spring and again at the end of the flowering period, though this may be in the holidays. Bulbs can also be planted in a spring meadow to extend its period of interest and colour. It is best to have a mix of short grass, which is good for soil invertebrates and the ground feeding birds that feed on them, and long grass, which is important for overwintering invertebrates such as ladybirds, lacewings and moths, and for providing shade and cover for amphibians.

Butterfly gardens can be created using a mix of plants which butterflies collect nectar from, such as buddleia, honeysuckle, lavender, sedum, oregano and marigold, and those that caterpillars feed on, such as holly, nettle, ivy and nasturtium. A nettle patch is particularly important for butterflies as several different species lay their eggs on them or feed on them.

A butterfly garden should always be located in a sheltered, sunny position e.g. up against a wall, and close to places where butterflies and moths can hibernate e.g. an undisturbed log pile.

Log, leaf and stone piles provide valuable homes for spiders, insects and other minibeasts, and can attract amphibians, hedgehogs, reptiles, birds, etc. They also support the growth of fungi, mosses and lichens. Ideally these features are placed in partially shaded areas so they have some warmth from the sun but can remain damp.

Log piles can also be placed on the edge of meadows or near ponds to provide a refuge for smaller creatures that might benefit from

these sources of food and water. Little maintenance is needed but if regularly used e.g. for minibeast hunting and identification activities, then it may be useful to have a few separate piles to reduce the frequency of disturbance.

Walls should not be ignored, particularly if they are old with cracks to provide homes for bees, snails, slugs and beetles. Wall surfaces support lichen, liverworts and creeping plants, which are valuable for insects and birds. In winter amphibians hibernate in them and in summer reptiles like to bask in the sunlight on them.



Invertebrate homes of varying shapes and sizes can be designed and constructed by pupils to provide shelter and a place for insects and other creatures to lay their eggs. These can be built from natural and scrap materials to suit particular species e.g. a tied-up bundle of hollow canes will attract overwintering solitary bees, a roll of corrugated cardboard provides a home for lacewings, or a buried plant pot loosely filled with dry moss or grass can be a home for bumble bees. A ladybird hotel is similar to a bird box but instead of a single hole at the front, several vertical slits should be cut on the sides.

These can be positioned separately in sheltered areas around the school grounds e.g. hung from trees or slotted into hedges or walls, or alternatively gathered together into a giant minibeast hotel, perhaps supported in a stack of pallets or an old bookcase. Stones and logs could also be included to add more nooks and crannies, and items such as feathers, leaves and straw could be inserted to provide materials for nest building.

Other homes can be constructed for a variety of creatures such as hedgehogs, frogs and toads, and snakes, though piles of logs, leaves, sticks, stones or compost will serve the purpose well.

Bird tables and feeding stations are an easy way to attract wildlife into the school grounds and can provide hours of fascination and opportunities for science and maths activities. A feeding station should be positioned in a sheltered spot where it is unlikely to be disturbed too often. Ideally, it will be close enough to the school building for observation from one or more windows. Free standing bird tables are easy to buy or construct and can provide support for hanging feeders with nuts, seeds and fat. Alternatively, simple trays and homemade feeders can be hung from tree branches. Nylon net feeders should not be used as these may damage birds' feet.

Birds should be fed throughout the year, but especially in very cold and wet weather, with a variety of foods including unsalted peanuts, fat, sunflower seeds, fresh coconut, currants, cheese and mixed bird seed. Bread has limited nutritional value and should be avoided. Ground feeding birds, such as blackbirds, will not feed from a table or hanging feeder so some food should be sprinkled on the floor. Ensure that feeders and bird tables are kept clean and disinfected to avoid passing on disease and parasites. A water bath should also be provided, close to the feeders, so birds can drink and wash. This should also be kept clean and topped up. During cold weather, check that it has not frozen.

Bird nesting boxes can be easily constructed, or bought, and fastened to trees, fences and walls around the school grounds and adjacent land (with permission).

There are a variety of shapes and sizes suitable for different species but generally they should be erected 3–6 metres high, away from too much noise and disturbance and facing a north-easterly direction, where possible, to avoid strong sunlight and wind. Boxes should not be opened between February and October, in case they are being used, and should be cleaned out during the winter.

Bat roosting boxes can be built to a number of different designs and can be fixed to trees or buildings, ideally, in clusters of three or more as bats roost in colonies. These should be fixed facing different directions so that the bats can choose which they prefer at different times of the year. They should be sheltered from strong winds but exposed to as much sunlight as possible to maintain the temperature inside, so south, south-east and south-west are probably the best directions. Boxes can be cleaned out in the autumn but only if they are empty as it is illegal to disturb bats.



Further information and resources

The **RSPB** (www.rspb.org.uk) provide lots of useful information and free resources, not only relating to birds but also on creating a variety of wildlife habitats. The **Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales** (www.welshwildlife.org) have a number of information sheets on bird boxes, butterfly gardens and other ways of attracting wildlife into the school grounds. **Butterfly Conservation** offer a range of downloadable activity sheets, teachers resources and guidance on gardening for butterflies (www.butterfly-conservation.org). Similarly, the **Bat Conservation Trust** provides lots of information about bats including a downloadable guide to making a bat box and education resources (www.bats.org.uk).

Spaces for growing and farming

Growing plants or fruit trees, and keeping animals, can be very rewarding and is a great way for children to learn about the processes and cycles of life – understanding where food comes from, how it grows and the way we interact with and are dependent upon the natural world. Being able to sow seeds, tend and water plants as they grow, harvest the crops and then eat them, perhaps even sharing the produce with parents and the community can give children a hugely influential experience that will stay with them for the rest of their lives. Pupils involved in growing activities can become more motivated, confident, responsible, caring and patient.

“Gardening in schools can have a profound impact when it comes to giving children the skills they need to reach their full potential in life.”

Gardening in Schools, Royal Horticultural Society, 2010



Cila Primary School

With increasing concern about future food security, developing food growing skills could be seen as essential preparation for a changing world. Recent research undertaken by the Royal Horticultural Society found that the “practical, hands-on nature of gardening meant children became more active, flexible thinkers who were better able to meet life’s challenges.”

Food growing and farming activities have clear links to healthy living, animal welfare and environmental issues, and can support many curriculum areas, particularly science, ESDGC, RE, food technology and geography. Some schools also use growing and gardening activities to teach enterprise skills, selling produce to the local community.

Growing food

Growing areas should be located in sunny, sheltered places and away from playgrounds, to avoid the risk of damage from balls, etc. The ground should be soft and well-draining, and a water supply should be close to hand – preferably a rainwater collection system, such as water butts. A composting area could be developed nearby to make the disposal of gardening waste and collection of compost easy. It is also important to consider security issues and where tools and equipment might be stored.

Many varieties of vegetables, fruit and herbs can easily be grown, even in the smallest school grounds, using pots and a wide variety of containers, such as hanging baskets, boxes, tyres, old sinks and chimney pots, and even old wellies and teapots. Potatoes can be grown in taller containers e.g. a dustbin, or in a stack of tyres. The important thing with containers is to ensure that they are well watered but also that they do not become waterlogged – small drainage holes and a layer of stones or broken pots at the bottom should do the trick.

Where more room is available, growing beds can be created, either at ground level or raised. Raised beds offer greater accessibility and reduce the risk of trampling and attack from pests such as rabbits. Beds can be constructed from wood, brick or stone but it is worth considering sustainable options such as reclaimed materials – recycled plastic board is a great substitute for wood. The height and depth of the beds may depend on the age of the children working on them, what is to be grown and whether both sides are to be accessed. Where several beds are built near to each other, enough space should be left between them for wheelchairs and wheelbarrows. With a number of beds, a demonstration of crop rotation can be created, or separate beds could be designated to each growing season or even each month of the year. To enable children to be involved in the whole growing process, it will be necessary to choose vegetables and fruit that are either ready for harvesting before the summer holidays or can last with limited attention through the summer and be ready for harvesting in the autumn.



Use of a greenhouse or polytunnel will help the school to grow plants from seed and perhaps explore more sensitive varieties or exotic species. To add an unusual feature and engage wider interest, some schools have constructed a greenhouse with used pop bottles collected from the local community.

Fruit trees provide an important wildlife habitat and food source and traditional orchards are considered to be a biodiversity hotspot, being designated a UK priority

habitat. They are also a great learning resource, not only providing an enjoyable way to learn about growing food, but also offering enterprise education opportunities and links to heritage and culture – with traditions in many countries associated with apples and other fruits. Even a couple of trees can be beneficial and if space is a problem, they can be planted in pots, up against a wall or fencing, or in a boundary hedge.

Formal and sensory gardens

In addition to growing food, the planting and creation of gardens may serve other purposes: supporting and exploring biodiversity, extending pupil's sensory experiences, providing opportunities for gaining vocational skills and qualifications, engaging with the community or simply making the school look attractive.

Sensory planting can enable children to interact with plants by touch, smell and sound. (See also sections on butterfly gardens and musical areas.) Gardens can be created to portray a specific theme such as nursery rhymes, shapes and colours, other countries, faiths and cultures, local industry, etc.

Growing organically, using natural ways to control pests and companion planting can help children to learn about protecting the environment and animal welfare issues.



Cila Primary School

Composting

There are several benefits from composting in schools: it reduces the cost of waste disposal, supplies a free soil conditioner for use around the school grounds, offers a great resource for various science activities, and contributes to sustainability by reducing waste going to landfill and the need to buy in compost, which often involves the destruction of peatland habitats.

Various designs of compost bin, in wood or plastic, can be either bought or constructed in school. From time to time, the council give away compost bins to schools. Usually, these should be open-bottomed and placed on bare soil so that worms and other minibeasts can get in to do their work and excess moisture can drain out. The composting process involves warmth so a composter will work best if it is positioned in sunlight. It should be easily accessible but not too close to buildings and playgrounds in case problems arise with smell, fruit flies, wasps or ants, etc. – though it is generally easy to control problems that do occur.



Ynystawe Primary School

The key to making good compost is to get the right mix between what are known as 'greens', which include grass cuttings, soft hedge clippings, vegetable peelings, and 'browns', including tea bags, straw, bedding from school pets (vegetarian only e.g. rabbit, hamster, etc), newspaper, paper towels, cardboard, and woodier clippings or prunings from around the grounds.



It is best to aim for a 50:50 mix and then adjust it depending on whether the mix seems too dry or too wet. Cooked food, meat, glossy paper and persistent weeds should not be put into the compost bin.

A composting area could be developed in the school grounds with a selection of alternatives and additions to the typical compost bin such as a compost heap, wormery, tumbler and leaf mould bin. These will enable pupils to explore different methods and processes involved in composting.

Keeping animals

Some welfare organisations discourage the keeping of animals in schools but other bodies believe that pets, poultry or livestock in school provide useful opportunities for children to learn how to care for animals and has great potential for extended study and observation activities. If animals are to be kept, then the school must ensure they have appropriate training and management plans in place to maintain animal welfare at all times, including weekends and holiday periods.



Alternatively, creating a small paddock within the school grounds, if there is room, would allow for short visits from farm animals, for a few days.

Further information and resources

Growing Schools (www.growingschools.org.uk) provides information and resources linked to outdoor education and gardening in schools. It also offers a free year planner for teachers with month-by-month tips and advice, recipes, etc. The **Royal Horticultural Society** (www.rhs.org.uk/Children/For-schools) offers schools a range of resources if they join their gardening campaign and organise an annual programme of INSET courses on various aspects of gardening in schools. **Garden Organic for Schools** (www.schoolsorganic.net) has a range of useful, free resources for schools, to support garden-based education. The **Food Growing in Schools Campaign** published an interesting report with inspirational case studies (www.sustainweb.org/childrensfoodcampaign/food_growing_in_schools). **Swansea Community Farm** (www.swanseacommunityfarm.org.uk) provides advice and training on organic growing, composting and animal husbandry. The **National Botanic Garden for Wales** (www.gardenofwales.org.uk) provides advice on growing food and pest control.

Spaces for structures and being creative

Providing seating and sheltered areas around the school grounds can support longer periods of study, a focal point for class discussions, storytelling or performance, and places for quiet activity and socialising during break times. Creatively designed structures, pathways, landscaping and art features can be inspirational and uplifting.

Outdoor classrooms and seating areas

Perhaps the simplest and most flexible way to create an outdoor classroom is for pupils to take mats or cushions outside with them to sit on. This allows the pupils to create a base near to the features they are working with e.g. close to a wildlife area being studied or in front of a wall or mural that is providing the backdrop to a performance.

However, if resources can be found, creating a variety of more permanent seating areas, classrooms and performance spaces will be useful for formal and informal activities. For example, log circles, willow domes, amphitheatres, wooden stages or bandstands, pergolas and gazebos, cob buildings, bird hides and observation platforms.



An effective outdoor classroom or performance space should be located away from noisy and more active areas, and designed in such a way that the pupils' focus is inwards towards each other. It may also provide a degree of shelter from the elements.

Simple benches can become special features, carved with figures or made from unusual materials. Seats can also sometimes double up as play equipment e.g. different sized logs as an assault course or arranged as a maze, but it may be necessary to define when such an area can be used for each of the different purposes.

Landscape features and art installations

Grassed mounds, gentle slopes and raised platforms provide a variation in level and perspective and can be used for viewing or leading games and performances, or as a focal point for role play and imaginative adventures, or simply for sitting and enjoying the sunshine.

Pathways are an important feature of well-designed school grounds leading from one zone to another and offering a way to protect children from potential hazards e.g. wet areas, and protect features, such as wildflower meadows, from being trampled. Varying the form and materials used for surfaces and paths adds interest and heightens the sensory experience. An assortment of hard and soft, natural and manmade materials can be used such as tarmac, grass, wood chip, cockles, logs and gravel. Bridges or tunnels can be inserted along pathways and stepping stones can be made using paving slabs or trunk slices.



Waunarlwydd Primary School

Fencing and walls not only provide useful boundaries and segregation between areas, but can be used as vertical surfaces upon which plants can be grown, activities can take place and artwork displayed. Young children can use these surfaces for mark making, vegetables and fruit can grow up trellising or in hanging baskets, fencing can be the base for weaving laces or fabrics, hand and foot holds can be fixed to create traversing walls, and murals can be painted, perhaps being renewed each year or each term with new scenes to promote imaginative play or curriculum themes.



Craigfelen Primary School

Signs and notices can help to bring the inside out, reinforcing the view that the school grounds are part of the learning environment. They can label or define different zones, provide useful information to parents and visitors and reminders to pupils of how to behave in certain areas, and they support literacy.

Erecting a signpost with directions to Cardiff, Ireland, London, the North Pole, etc. is a simple way to encourage imaginative play.



Ynystawe Primary School

Sculptures and murals can be created using a range of methods and a variety of materials, during art lessons or by an art club, perhaps involving pupils working with local artists. For example, totems made from logs and tree trunks to depict local wildlife species or historical figures, or a frieze using ceramic tiles made by pupils in the school. Wood carvings, stained glass, murals, mosaics, etc. can also be incorporated into seating and other structures.

Labyrinths and mazes can add aesthetically pleasing and fun features to the grounds. (A labyrinth has one entrance and a single route to the exit whereas a maze gives the walker choices and may have dead ends.) They can be created using a variety of flat or raised materials including hedging, willow, vertical posts, logs, soil mounds, long grass, paving or herbs beds.

Willow can be used to create living sculptures that grow and change through the seasons. These can be designed to provide tunnels or a canopy over a seating area. These structures do require a little maintenance each year to keep them looking good. Willow, and other suitable plants, can be grown in the school grounds to provide a free supply of materials for weaving and basketry activities.



Pengelli Primary School

Musical areas can be created in the outside space e.g. xylophones created from wooden blocks, plastic pipes or bamboo tubes; drums made from a variety of metal and plastic everyday items such as buckets, pots and pans; wind chimes comprising lengths of bamboo or copper pipe.

Natural music and soundscapes can be created by planting tall grasses and bamboo in a location where they can catch the breeze, or installing a fountain or stream feature with running water.



Casllwchwr Primary School

Recycled and sustainable materials

The use of recycled, reclaimed and locally sourced materials can be incorporated into school grounds projects and become additional features and educational resources. For example, recycled plastic wood substitutes can be used for fencing, benches and path edging. Paths can be filled using a range of interesting materials such as recycled glass, wood chip or reclaimed aggregate, stone or bricks. The waste from local industries can also be used such as cockle shells or Margam slag; providing links to local heritage. Where new wood and wood-based products are used, these should come from a sustainable local source or be certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Traditional building techniques can be employed such as cob and straw bale building, dry stone walls and hedge-laying.



Renewable energy projects

It is easy to install small, demonstration water, wind or solar powered features in the school grounds. It may be possible to install larger renewable energy generation system, such as a solar PV array or a wind turbine, to provide more substantial energy to the school and so save costs or even earn money for the school by supplying electricity back to the National Grid.

Further information and resources

The **Down to Earth Project** (www.downtoearthproject.org.uk) offers support and training for traditional and sustainable building and use of the outdoors for ESDGC. **Out to Learn Willow** (www.outtolearnwillow.co.uk) provides workshops and willow kits. **The Labyrinth Builders** (www.labyrinthbuilders.co.uk) provide inspiration for mazes and labyrinths. **Generation Green** is a schools education programme by British Gas with free teaching resources and opportunity to win prizes (www.generationgreen.co.uk). **Solar4Schools** offers solar electric installations for schools and has downloadable teaching resources (www.solar4schools.co.uk).

Spaces for play and being active

Most schools have some areas of hard-surface playgrounds which are used for running about and playing ball games but there are many other ways to encourage physical exercise and active play. Creating new and imaginative features and spaces in the school grounds not only promotes more productive playtimes and reduces boredom, but can also enhance the teaching of PE, dance, drama and other areas of the curriculum.

“A rich play environment is one where children and young people are able to make a wide range of choices; where there are many possibilities so that they can invent and extend their own play.”

Play Wales website

Play equipment

Many schools invest in fixed play equipment with soft surface areas but others prefer the flexibility of moveable play equipment. Wooden forts or dens can be bought or built quite cheaply. Imaginative and active play can be supported in areas designed around a specific theme e.g. the seaside, pirates or outer space – a simple wooden structure can be converted from a boat to a spaceship with just a few simple materials and a little imagination.



Playground markings can transform tarmac or concrete surfaces, encourage a wider range of team and traditional games, and support literacy and numeracy skills. Vertical surfaces can also be used in a similar way.

All play equipment, whether bought or built, must be designed, constructed and maintained to high safety standards.

Many indoor activities can simply be transferred to the outdoors, and often benefit from the additional space available e.g. sand pits, water troughs, dressing up boxes, art easels, etc.





Sports activities and trails

Most schools, particularly in the junior and secondary sectors, value marked pitches on their fields and playgrounds for traditional team sports such as football, rugby and netball. Schools that do not have enough space or prefer to use their grounds for other purposes may be able to use a local park or share the facilities of other schools.

Where space and funding is available, MUGAs (Multi Use Games Areas) and all weather sports pitches can provide robust and very functional resources for both school activities and community use. As with all play equipment, these should be designed, installed and maintained to high safety standards.

There are many simple ways to provide the stimulus and equipment for children to improve their physical skills during playtimes as well as PE lessons. Target games can be painted or fixed to walls, tyres and logs can be arranged on grass areas to form an obstacle course, or playground markings can be used to encourage traditional active games such as hopscotch or skipping.

Many schools are now installing climbing or traversing walls, and adventure or fitness trails e.g. monkey bars, balancing beams, rope walks, that can test and improve children's balance, agility and coordination.

Orienteering courses can be set up in and around the school grounds using formal orienteering markers or simply key features such as trees, seating areas, art installations and fence posts. Orienteering not only supports physical activity but also geography and maths.

Secure storage facilities should be available to support pupils and staff cycling to and from school.



Further information and resources

There are many commercial organisations providing play and sports equipment and their websites – easily found through an Internet search – provide lots of ideas.

RoSPA (www.rospace.com/leisuresafety/playsafety) give information and advice on all aspects of playground safety including the installation, use and maintenance of play and sports equipment. The **British Schools Orienteering Association** provides advice and resources for orienteering and schools (www.bsoa.org).

PART 4: LOCAL CASE STUDIES

This section presents inspirational case studies on several local schools – outlining their achievements and offering tips on how to be successful.

These case studies represent a selection of the many local schools that demonstrate good practice in the use and enhancement of their grounds. These and other schools across Swansea welcome visits and are happy to share information and ideas.

Bishopston Primary School

Bishopston Primary School is situated six miles west of Swansea on the Gower Peninsula and has about 270 pupils on roll. The school is housed in two separate buildings; KS2 in a traditional 1950's building and Foundation Phase in a purpose-built open-plan 1970s building.

What they have done

The whole school has embarked on a project to make the school grounds into a resource providing practical first-hand experience for a variety of subjects. This has involved constructing a pond, wildflower areas, willow sculptures and raised beds for growing vegetables. Play equipment, seating and paths (including a cockle shell path) have also been installed. The site and its features are open and available for use by the community out of school hours.



A notable feature is *George's Room*, a striking outdoor classroom constructed with cob walls using traditional building techniques. It was named after a pupil that had been involved in the project but sadly died before it was completed. It is used as the base for activities such as storytelling and play, but mainly in the summer months.

An unexpected success was the creation of simple grass mounds on the school field which are well used by pupils for creative play outside lesson times. Trees have also been planted in the school grounds for future use in Forest School activities.



How they went about it

It was crucial that the head drove the project and discussed the reasons for developing the school grounds with the Governing Body. Teaching Assistants, with Forest School training and an interest in outdoor education, were given time to develop the proposals.

The Down to Earth Project was involved in two key development projects, the first being the construction of *George's Room*, which involved working with pupils, through 2009/10, in both the design and construction phases.

Secondly, as part of a wider project to help Gower schools develop their grounds, Down to Earth Project staff helped renew and develop the wildlife area – clearing an existing pond, hedge laying, path building, creating a fire pit with seating, and erecting fencing.

How they got the resources

The school has accessed funding from a variety of sources including the Gower Society, the Gower AONB Sustainable Development Fund, sponsorship from companies with which parents are involved. The school also allocated funding from their own budget and the school PTA funded the new play equipment. Down to Earth secured a separate SDF for their work with Gower schools. Funding for further developments has been raised through non-uniform days and the Swans4Schools Scheme.



An important contribution to the development projects has been the investment of time and effort by volunteers including parents and others from the community, and a team of young people through the Global Xchange programme.

What next

- install a bouldering or traversing wall
- construct a play boat
- build a stage area for role play at break times and for outdoor concerts

Top tips

- give people the freedom to show their skills – it can be surprising what you discover
- think carefully about location of features e.g. the pond is too far from buildings
- watch out for VAT e.g. on materials purchased by contractors
- the grass mounds were cheap and simple but have been very successful
- children love the play equipment

Cila Primary School

Cila Primary School is located in Upper Killay, approximately four miles from the centre of Swansea, and can accommodate around 150 pupils. The main building was originally built in 1910 and, over the past century, this has been extended and extra demountable classrooms added.

What they have done

The school grounds have gradually been developed and features introduced over several years, in many instances to exploit unused spaces or remove hazards.

At the front of the school, there is a play fort and a boat-shaped outdoor classroom, used for reading, group discussion and imaginative play. Alongside this is the 'Shop and Slide Unit' – fixed play equipment on a soft surface area. There is also a memorial garden, used by parents waiting to pick up children.



About eight years ago, an outdoor learning space for Early Years pupils was created in an unused area between demountable classrooms, with a wooden play chalet and a large covered sandpit nearby. The Nursery play area/yard has also been resurfaced with a mix of black, green and red safety tiles. The school found that boys were more inclined to read in the outdoors and so a sensory garden was created three years ago, with a nearby covered area. This area, with its mural and water feature, offers a space for quietness, reflection and relaxation.

The main playground and grassed area to the rear of the school buildings have been extensively enhanced with an adventure play area, a performance stage, raised decking, outdoor classrooms and seating areas, a turf-roofed roundhouse, playground markings, apple trees and traditional board games fixed to fencing. Two sides of the playground are bordered by colourful wooden fences shaped and painted to represent giant pencils.

The outdoor stage, with a solid curtain backdrop, is used at the end of the summer term for the annual concert watched by parents and community members. The pupils use this area on a daily basis and enjoy performing outdoors for class assemblies. The stage has developed pupils' speaking and listening, social skills, self expression and team work.



Boardwalks have been constructed on one side of the playground on what had been an unusable and unsafe banked area. Cut-outs of Gower animals are placed along the edge of this zone and seating has been placed on sections of the retaining wall.

A bird nest box has been erected with an observation camera inside. Each class has its own raised bed for growing vegetables, which are then sold to the community. There is also a composting area.

The grounds are regularly used for assemblies and concerts, and children eat outside during the summer and are allowed to use musical instruments in the performance areas during playtimes. Teaching assistants oversee different areas of the grounds during playtimes to support a range of activities.

How they went about it

It was decided that the grounds needed to be enhanced in order to support increased use of the outdoors across the whole school. Improvements to the outside space was included in the school development plan but it was agreed that the playground should be retained, with the addition of markings, and so the focus for development was primarily disused areas around the site.



The school gardening club worked with the Killay Gardening Club to design and carry out research for the sensory garden, and pupils submitted a successful funding application to the Gower Society. An artist worked with the children on decorative panels. The adventure play area was designed by the pupils and funded by the PTA. Local disaffected young people helped with clearance work and the construction of features e.g. raised decking and the 'Cila Caribbean' boat.

How they got the resources

The Welsh Assembly Government gave funding for the outdoor classroom, a soft play area for the nursery was part funded by the LEA, a Community Focussed Schools grant contributed towards the stage and sensory garden, the Gower Society gave a grant which was used to buy plants and garden items. Plants were donated by the Singleton Botanical Gardens, a local garden centre, Governors and parents. Reclaimed stone was used for construction of the water feature.

The Council's Property Services resurfaced the yard and match funding for several projects came from the Council's health and safety grants.

What next

- set up a low level adventure trail with scrambling net
- continue boardwalks with more animal cut outs
- install a climbing or traversing wall
- create a mural to celebrate school's centenary

Top tips

- be imaginative, have a vision, be persistent
- outside artists and developers should work with pupils on design and implementation
- an active school council can be useful
- think carefully before changing things – don't remove things you value

Craigfelen Primary School

Craigfelen Primary School is in the village of Graigfelen, five miles north east of Swansea, and has capacity for 125 pupils. The five acre school grounds include an all-weather sports court, a rugby pitch and playground areas, and is open for community use outside school hours.

What they have done

Working with local community groups and partnerships, the school have developed a range of interesting outdoor features and teaching resources including a willow classroom, a growing zone and kitchen garden, sensory planting areas, a community allotment, a nature reserve, a composting area and an outdoor adventure trail. There are also a soft surface area and a growing area for the Foundation Phase.



Perhaps the most significant and long-term project at Craigfelen is the nature reserve which was initially created in 1983 when a piece of neglected land in the school grounds was transformed to support and encourage wildlife. This project earned the school the prestigious Prince of Wales Award and a Colonel Sanders environmental award. Further improvement work took place in 2005 and 2008, engaging volunteers and a local youth group. The reserve has trees, a pond, a variety of plants, paths and seating areas.



Each class is timetabled to use the nature reserve twice a week.

All the vegetables and fruit grown in the school grounds is used for Harvest Festival activities and other events, and sometimes there is enough to distribute to the community. The school Eco-Committee and the Craigfelen Tigers, an after school and holiday club, make use of the school grounds and help to maintain and develop them.

How they went about it

In 2008, the school employed an experienced environmental worker to lead the nature reserve improvement project and grounds development. The community was engaged to ensure that their needs and interests were taken into account. Initial designs were drawn-up and fine-tuned by relevant experts. The children were involved in the design process, measuring the areas, soil testing, consultation exercises, letter-writing, fundraising and presenting ideas to the Governors.

This environmental worker continues to be employed for one day a week to work with pupils throughout the school, manage and maintain the reserve and other parts of the school, and train and inspire staff. Before any grounds developments, they ensure that they have the support of parents and the wider community.



How they got the resources

The school has received funding for the development of its outdoor areas from the WCVA, Cydcoed (Forestry Commission), Communities First Trust Fund, Gower Society, National Lottery, Co-operative and the Millennium Stadium Charitable Trust.

Local community groups associated with the school have also accessed funds not available to the school e.g. the Craigmelen Home School Association secured an Awards for All grant of almost £5,000 to increase environmental skills of the community and fund moveable raised beds, protective clothing, tools, tutor fees, plants and flowers, materials and venue hire.

Volunteer help has come from a variety of sources including parents, the local youth and cross-generation group, the children and youth society, the Probation Service, the mother and toddler group and the Tigers youth group, for specific projects and for the annual reserve spruce up.

What next

- enhance and enrich what has already been developed
- skill building so that features and resources will continue to be used

Top tips

- the school grounds have to be regarded as a high priority and be prominent in the school development plan
- developments should reflect the children's and community's voice
- engage with environmental partnerships and use experts to develop the staff skills base

Waunarlwydd Primary School

Located about five miles to the north-west of the centre of Swansea, Waunarlwydd Primary School has approximately 275 pupils on roll. The school grounds encompass a woodland and large areas of grass and playing fields. A new Foundation Phase unit has recently been built.

What they have done

The school has a well-established, award-winning woodland area that has been developed over many years. This has been kept fairly wild e.g. with brambles, but also has cockleshell pathways, boardwalks, seating areas, bird boxes and feeders, and a wetland area. This is open outside school times and available for community use.

A further section of woodland is being developed at the opposite end of the site where extensive tree planting has been undertaken on part of the school fields. There are several small seating areas around the field, leaving a central space for sports activities. On one edge of the field a grassy bank has been created with several tunnels set into it. There is an additional mound and tunnel feature near the Foundation phase area.

A Higher Level Teaching Assistant delivers Forest School activities throughout the school during PPA cover periods. The school also has a rolling programme for new staff to receive Forest School training to ensure that the woodland resources are well used. A training programme for governors and parents is also well embedded, and practice is regularly shared with other schools through the provision of INSET as well as Professional Learning Network activities.



Tyres are used for growing activities but some new wooden planters have recently been constructed for future use. There is a wormery which is maintained by the eco clubs. There are also two areas with a selection of commercially produced play equipment, such as a slide and climbing frames.

A willow dome and log circle were recently removed to accommodate a new Foundation Phase building, but these features are to be reinstated elsewhere in the grounds.

How they went about it

A community group, called Branches of Waunarlwydd, was established to raise funds and support developments in the school's woodland area. This group, involving parents, Governors and community members, had a separate bank account and met in evenings to discuss plans. Maintenance was included in the school's budget to ensure its upkeep.

Pupils have been involved in surveying the grounds and the planning processes that led to the tunnels, new woodland area, etc. There are two eco clubs – juniors meet after school and infants during lunchtime – which undertake a lot of the grounds improvements and maintenance. Along with the school council, these clubs have been responsible for letter writing to garden centres, etc. to ask for contributions towards grounds projects, and also feed back to the whole school on progress.



The school organised a tree planting day, involving parents, to plant the new woodland area. Each child in the school had their own labelled tree. Pupils are involved in risk assessments of the school grounds. Years 3 and 4 pupils risk assess with their teachers and Year 5 and 6 pupils do their own risk assessments, and also undertake risk assessments for younger children. The children take these assessments outside with them. This improves awareness of hazards and encourages pupils to take responsibility for managing risk for themselves.



How they got the resources

The Forestry Commission has supported the woodland development work through its Cydcoed grant scheme. The willow for the willow dome was obtained, free-of-charge, from the National Botanic Garden of Wales. The cockles for the paths were collected from a company in Penclawdd, again without charge. A large number of saplings were acquired through the Trees for All campaign, run by the Woodland Trust. The Gower Society have donated £500 for new planters and shrubs.

What next

- erect cut out wooden shapes and signs on bare fences and around playground
- redo paths and boardwalks in woodland area

Top tips

- ensure centrality to annual school development planning so that provision becomes an integral part, not an 'add on'
- a sustainability plan is important because it is easier to find resources to start a project but more difficult to maintain it
- essential to have the head on board and useful to have a lead teacher
- important to have the support of the school site manager to carry out day-to-day maintenance and safety checks
- involve children from the onset to help avoid vandalism

Ynystawe Primary School

Ynystawe Primary School, located about four miles north east of the city of Swansea, has approximately 200 pupils on roll. The main building dates from 1889 and comprises five classrooms and a staff area grouped around a central hall. Early Years pupils are housed in a newer purpose-built facility linked to the main building with an enclosed play area. Prior to their school grounds development project, the outside space was a small, hard-surfaced yard, typical of an inner city Victorian school site.

What they have done

Over the past decade, the school has transformed the tarmac yard into outdoor learning areas with a range of features including a raised pond, a calendar garden, a running-water feature, a grassed area, adventure play equipment, outdoor classrooms, performance spaces, woodland areas, a bird hide, a hen coop, a composting area and vegetable planters.

One outdoor classroom is constructed to resemble an old barge, reflecting the local canal heritage. It also incorporates a small wind turbine and a photovoltaic solar panel, which generate power for the classroom.



The small 'inner woodland', located within the school grounds, includes a bird bath, bird feeders, wooden sculptures, seating and a bird hide, which overlooks the 'outer woodland', just outside the school boundary wall, where a fire pit, log circle, performance stage and walkways have been created.

All pupils are involved in growing activities and there is also an eco gardening club. Children care for the hens and have opportunity to buy eggs – two at a time. The school has links with a local farmer who takes weekly orders from the pupils for vegetables.

How they went about it

Following attendance at an inspirational INSET at the National Botanic Garden of Wales, the head teacher arranged for training on school grounds use and development for all the staff and Governors. This led to commissioning LandVision, a sustainable land management and design consultancy, who worked with the children to explore how the grounds could be developed e.g. every child drew or painted what they thought it should look like. Parents were invited to an evening event to discuss what the school was hoping to achieve – the children's pictures were presented and parents were asked for their opinions and ideas. From this consultation, LandVision prepared plans, which were also discussed with children and parents. The LEA were asked to be involved and helped with surveying for underground services.



Parents were sent questionnaires about skills they could contribute to support the project e.g. building, letter writing, gardening, child care, etc. A core project group was established involving staff and parents to oversee the project. The development of the project and implementation of the plans involved special events and weekend workdays, to which parents and children were invited. At one event, a storyteller asked the children to create models of features they would like to see and place them around the grounds – a story was then woven around these. A planting day was held with a horticulturalist helping to decide where plants should be located.

An area of overgrown and unused mature woodland adjacent to the school was 'informally' adopted and developed to provide an additional resource. This space includes a public right of way and so the improvements had wider community benefit.

Opportunities for team games are more limited because of the introduction of new features but this is mitigated by easy access to a local park for sports activities.

Parents and Governors, as well as teaching staff, have received outdoor education training, and all staff, including teaching assistants and the site manager are Forest School trained. A grounds maintenance file has been prepared which includes information on the plants, etc. in the school grounds, and ideas on how to use the various outdoor resources.



How they got the resources

The school contributed an initial £20,000 from its budget and a further £20,000 at a later stage. Funding was raised from various other sources including Cydcoed, the Welsh Assembly Government, local businesses and PTA fundraising events. One event involved a sleep-over in the school for older pupils, each paying for the experience, followed by a celebration day in the school grounds, raising a substantial amount of funding. The project also benefitted from a huge amount of voluntary help from staff, parents and the local community, and donations of plants.

What next

- create a faith garden
- develop a parents' waiting area with seating and planters
- install a climbing wall and more seating underneath the arches

Top tips

- make sure that insurance is in place for parents and volunteers to use equipment
- join Learning through Landscapes to access their resources and services
- commitment of governors, key staff and parent group is important to drive and maintain the project
- remind parents waiting to pick up children that the grounds are also used for lessons
- get advice – the LEA were especially helpful at all stages

Bishopston Comprehensive School

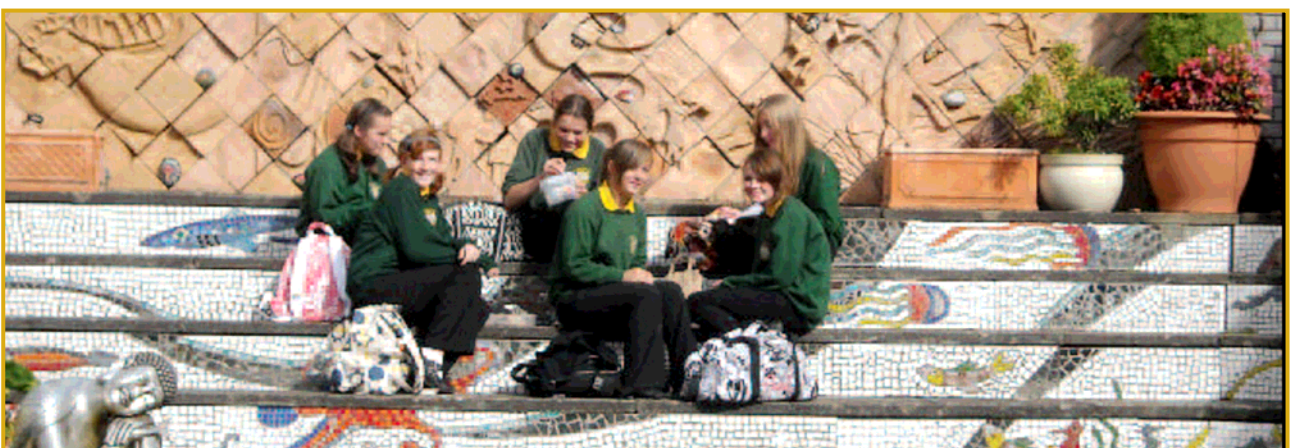
Bishopston Comprehensive School is in a semi-rural location six miles west of Swansea and has over 1,000 pupils on roll. There are extensive grounds, primarily used as playing fields with marked pitches. A public path goes through the school grounds and some of the facilities are used informally outside school times.



What they have done

The school has been able to develop a wide range of high quality sports facilities in the grounds including floodlit tennis courts, a MUGA and new orienteering courses. Two interesting areas have been created – a Peace Garden and an Outdoor Learning Centre.

In 2007, work began on a two-year project to transform a small, drab quad in the middle of the school into a Zen-style Peace Garden with a small Buddha water feature, an Acer tree, potted plants, seating, murals, mosaics and painted stones. There is also an array of brightly coloured stained glass windows with symbols relating to different faiths. This area is used by pupils as a quiet and relaxing space during lunchtime and occasionally for lessons and activities.



The school has recently undertaken a project to develop the former caretaker's garden into an Outdoor Learning Centre. The caretaker's house had already been developed as part of, and to be used for, ASDAN and BTEC Construction programmes. The adjacent garden, which had become an overgrown eyesore close to the school's entrance, was the logical next step, offering opportunities for land based studies and farming skills. With support from the Down to Earth Project, cleft wood fencing has been installed around the area and a large cob seat has been constructed. Beds are now being constructed for growing plants and vegetables, and also herbs for the school kitchen.

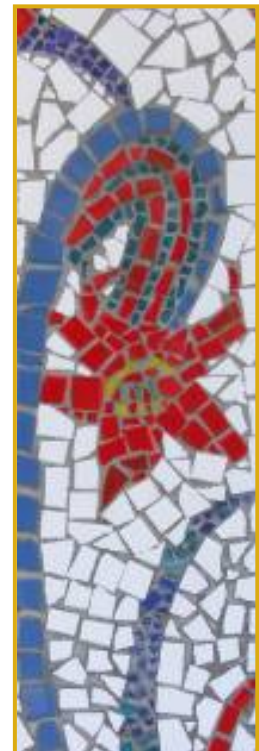


How they went about it

Pupils and staff worked together on creating the Peace Garden.

Work teams from the Council's Employment

Training Centre helped with construction work for the outdoor learning centre. The school arts club helped with the design and construction of mosaics to decorate the cob seating area.



How they got the resources

The school's PTA have raised funds for projects such as the Peace Garden and the MUGA. The floodlit tennis courts were built with support from Sportlot, the WLTA, and the local authority. The new ASDAN garden area has been developed with help from the Down to Earth Project with funding through the Gower AONB Sustainable Development Fund. Composting bins were provided free by the Council's Recycling Service.

What next

- construct raised beds, install polytunnel in the outdoor learning area
- add picnic benches to create relaxed area for lunchtimes
- erect climbing wall
- add glass house for additional growing space

Top tips

- pupils have to see the purpose for being involved in development projects e.g. vocational qualifications
- keep a written and photographic diary to record progress as a motivational tool

PART 5: WHERE TO GET SUPPORT AND HELP

This section outlines where schools can find useful funding, resources and support, including advice, training and practical help from local organisations.

Finding funding and resources for school grounds projects

Funding for school grounds development and for enhancing the provision of outdoor education can be sought and secured from a wide variety of sources including the school's budget; grants from trusts, promotional campaigns and government schemes; donations from local businesses and community groups; and fundraising events or appeals organised by the school or by an associated group, such as the PTA or an out-of-school club.

Grant schemes and promotional campaigns often only last for a period, though in some cases they are repeated, if the administrators consider them to be successful. It is important to visit a selection of websites, such as SEEF, and read relevant newsletters on a regular basis to check for news about new funding opportunities and free resources. Schools cannot apply for some grants themselves but an independent community group, such as the PTA, or another group that uses or has an interest in the development of the grounds, may be able to apply instead.

Involving parents and the wider community from an early stage and throughout school development projects will lay the ground for seeking sponsorship and donations from local businesses, and support for fundraising campaigns and events. Parents can often establish links to the businesses and industries for which they work. Fundraising events can be a fun way to show the school's commitment to a project. These can be focussed on the school grounds e.g. work days or celebrations, or linked to national events such as Science Week (March), Wales Biodiversity Week (May), Environment Week (June), National School Grounds Week (June), Apple Day (October) or Tree Week (November).

Breaking up projects into smaller elements will enable the school to set achievable funding targets and will help funders and fundraisers to see exactly what impact their contribution can have. Being able to point to successes and developments already made, and funding or resources already secured, can often help to draw in further support from additional sources. Providing progress updates to previous supporters may also result in them being receptive to further requests.

Contributions are not always in the form of funding – the donation of materials or volunteer help can be just as, or even more, useful than cash as this not only reduces costs but also the effort and time associated with sourcing and collecting products. These in-kind contributions may also be used to match fund certain grant schemes.

Applying for grants successfully

Here are a few tips for writing successful funding applications:

- Check the application deadline and set aside enough time
- Follow the guidelines and the eligibility criteria
- Draft your answers carefully, being clear and avoiding repetition
- Provide convincing evidence of the need for the project and its benefits
- Make sure your application stands out by being innovative
- Demonstrate that you have good project and financial management skills
- Include references to evaluation, maintenance and longer-term aspirations

Below is a list of trusts, campaigns, awards and grant schemes that may support school grounds projects. Always remember that these funding sources may change focus or eligibility criteria, often have limited application periods and can close down entirely.

Awards for All is a simple small grants scheme making awards of between £500 and £5,000. This National Lottery funding programme aims to help improve local communities and the lives of people most in need. www.awardsforall.org.uk/wales

Biffaward offers funding to community and environmental projects across the UK. It uses landfill tax credits donated by Biffa Waste Services and is managed by the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts. www.biffaward.org

CABE education grants promote projects that explore the design and use of buildings and public spaces, and encourage the development of partnerships between schools, community groups and local organisations. www.cabe.org.uk/education

CSV Action Earth campaign supports projects and people making a positive difference to their local environment. www.actionearth.org.uk

Environment Wales is a voluntary sector partnership that aims to contribute to sustainable development by supporting and encouraging voluntary action to protect and improve the environment. www.environment-wales.org

Ernest Cook Trust is one of the UK's leading educational charities and offers grants to support projects that encourage children and young people to learn from the land. www.ernestcooktrust.org.uk

Gower AONB Sustainable Development Fund provides grants for innovative, sustainable and environmental projects in the AONB area, including managing school grounds for wildlife, and energy and waste projects. www.swansea.gov.uk/aonb

John Laing Charitable Trust provides grants of £250 to £25,000 and its main themes include both education and the environment. www.laing.com/top/corporate_responsibility/john_laing_charitable_trust.html

Keep Wales Tidy run a number of community-focussed projects to clean and improve neighbourhoods, and reduce litter. www.keepwalestidy.org/our-projects

Morrisons Let's Grow Programme is a voucher collection scheme which aims to help schools grow their own fruit and vegetables in the school grounds. Vouchers can be redeemed for gardening equipment, seeds, etc. www.morrisons.co.uk/LetsGrow

Moto in the Community Trust is a grant giving charity that will support practical conservation projects, playground development and community gardens, usually within 25 miles of a Moto service area. www.motointhecommunity.co.uk

RBS Supergrounds programme website includes lots of information and advice, and the programme has included an award scheme. www.rbssupergrounds.com

RHS Campaign for School Gardening Alan Titchmarsh Award is a grant of £250 National Garden Gift Vouchers available to schools that reach level 4 on the Campaign's Benchmarking Scheme. www.rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening/teachershome/news/alantitchmarshaward.aspx

Tesco for Schools and Clubs Scheme enables UK schools and clubs to redeem vouchers for a variety of items including equipment to support outdoor learning and school grounds development. www.tescoforschoolsandclubs.co.uk

Tree Council has a grants programme for schools which provides between £100 and £700 to cover up to 75% towards planting costs. www.treecouncil.org.uk/treeties

Useful publications and websites

Throughout this guide references have been made to websites and organisations that provide resources and support on specific issues. Below is a list of publications that cover wider aspects of policy and practice in school grounds development and use.

Government guidance documents

The UK government's Department for Education (under various titles) has published various guidelines and reports linked to school grounds development:

- School Grounds: a Guide to Good Practice (Building Bulletin 85), DfEE, 1997
- The Outdoor Classroom (Building Bulletin 71), DfEE, 1999
- Briefing Framework for Secondary School Projects (Building Bulletin 98), DfES, 2004
- Briefing Framework for Primary School Projects (Building Bulletin 99), DfES, 2006
- Schools for the Future: Designing School Grounds, DfES, 2006
- Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto, DfES, 2006
- Design for Play: a Guide to Creating Successful Play Spaces, DCSF, 2008

Learning through Landscapes resources

LTL is the leading school grounds charity in the UK with over 20 years experience supporting outdoor learning and play in education. In Wales, they operate as LTL Cymru: www.ltl.org.uk/wales. LTL have produced many useful resources, including:

- **Workout:** Secondary School Grounds Toolkit, 2005
- **First Steps Outdoors:** free resource for Foundation Phase settings in Wales, 2010

Other guides and resources

Several local authorities and voluntary organisations across the UK have developed informative and inspiring guides for school grounds development and use, including:

- The former **Cheshire County Council** produced an excellent School Grounds handbook, now available from the Cheshire West and Chester council website: www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/planning/specialist_environmental_servs/climate_change-sustainability/eco_schools/school_grounds.aspx
- **Norfolk County Council** Environmental and Outdoor Learning Team have developed a range of resources, tips and services to support school grounds development: www.schools.norfolk.gov.uk/go/groundsforinspiration
- **Lancashire County Council** Environmental Projects Team have produced a ten step School Grounds Development Guide which is available from their website: www.lancashire.gov.uk/environment/schoolgrounds
- **Cambridgeshire Environmental Education Service** provides ideas on school grounds development including a guidance booklet on habitat creation. www.cees.org.uk/grounds_development.htm
- **The Council for Learning outside the Classroom** promotes outdoor learning and provides guidance, CPD materials and other resources. www.lotc.org.uk
- **Growing Schools** provides support for the use of the outdoor classroom as a resource across the curriculum for pupils of all ages. www.growingschools.org.uk

Directory of support for school grounds development and use

SEEF has produced a directory of support to accompany this guide, which has been published as a separate document so that it can easily be updated from time to time. The directory includes contact details for relevant local and national organisations with a brief description of the support they offer. It also has a quick reference table to make it easy to find the type of advice, practical support and expertise you need. Check the SEEF website, www.seeforum.org.uk, for the latest edition.