

# How can the outdoor provision in EYFS be maximised to ensure that children meet the heightened expectations of the revised EYFS framework?

## Southwold School, EYFS Phase

### Abstract

With the revision of the EYFS framework and Southwold EYFS outdoor provision being an area of development in the School Development Plan, it has been decided that the outdoor provision has to be maximised to ensure that it meets the heightened expectations outlined in the new statutory framework. EYFS staff implemented changes to our outdoor provision to ensure that learning opportunities outside impact on children's progress and facilitate clear opportunity to meet the end of year standards. *'Every child deserves the best possible start in life and the support that enables them to fulfil their potential. Children develop quickly in the early years and a child's experiences between birth and age five have a major impact on their future life chances. A secure, safe and happy childhood is important in its own right. Good parenting and high quality early learning together provide the foundation children need to make the most of their abilities and talents as they grow up.'* Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage (Department for Education (DfE), 2021).

The findings of the study show that maximised outdoor provision parallel opportunity with indoor provision. All Reception children engaged in the quality learning opportunities provided in the outdoor area. Through carefully planned activities, adult interaction, reorganised areas of learning and well considered resourcing, the outdoor area offered children depth in learning opportunities which impact across the assessed areas for learning. Being outdoors had a positive impact on children's sense of wellbeing and physical health, communication skills, confidence and offered opportunities for learning new things in different ways and on different scales compared to being indoors. Despite not all children achieving ELGs, the end of year outcomes demonstrated that all children made strong progress from their baseline with outcomes above national figures.

### Introduction

Southwold is a two-form entry primary school in the London borough of Hackney, providing education for children between the ages of three to eleven. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language are higher than the national average. The proportion of pupils eligible to receive the pupil premium is also higher than average. Most children start school with skills typically

well below what is expected for their age and in 2021 this percentage was even lower due to the missed education opportunities during the pandemic period.

In September 2021, all EYFS staff received training reflecting the changes of the EYFS statutory framework. The key changes were noted and EYFS staff ensured the new recommendations were taken into account when planning opportunities for learning. The DfE state that the intended aims of the updates are to improve outcomes for children and strengthen language development, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Implementing the changes into the whole EYFS provision has become a priority. The practitioners also had to take into account that children starting Reception this academic year, most probably, have had limited outdoor experience during their life due to the pandemic. Over the past two years of intermittent lockdowns with much reduced opportunity for children to socialise and with many studies showing that disadvantaged families were impacted more by limited access to outdoor space, the way this may have affected our Reception cohort of children, was concerning.

Later, the data compiled of baseline assessment in Figures 1 and 2 shows that the vast amount of children were working below in all areas of learning with only 19% of disadvantaged children on track. The observations of the children taken in autumn term showed that many children had limited interaction skills, finding it harder to self-regulate and lacking confidence.

**Fig.1 Baseline assessment**

|                                   |                 |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Communication and Language</b> | <b>Baseline</b> |
|                                   | 48%             |
| <b>PSE Development</b>            | <b>Baseline</b> |
|                                   | 48%             |
| <b>Physical Development</b>       | <b>Baseline</b> |
|                                   | 59%             |
| <b>Literacy</b>                   | <b>Baseline</b> |
|                                   | 35%             |
| <b>Mathematics</b>                | <b>Baseline</b> |
|                                   | 43%             |
| <b>Understanding the World</b>    | <b>Baseline</b> |
|                                   | 43%             |
| <b>Expressive Arts and Design</b> | <b>Baseline</b> |
|                                   | 46%             |

|                    | Baseline (WAE) |
|--------------------|----------------|
| All (49)           | 33%            |
| Disadvantaged (16) | 19%            |
| Boys (27)          | 43%            |
| Girls (22)         | 25%            |
| SEN (2)(6)         | 0%             |

**Fig. 2 Percentage at a Good Level of Development in September**

Jan White, (2011) makes the point that young children’s access to extensive and high quality outdoor experiences is extremely variable (and commonly low). His question ‘How can we develop our daily outdoor provision to make the most of this for all our children?’ has become our main question too.

The outdoor provision has to be a place where children can fully immerse themselves in all types of learning, whether this is developing their gross motor skills, or strengthening their language development, growing their confidence or investigating and experiencing things, and ‘having a go’. An outdoor area has to offer children activities on a larger scale and for some children the space may become a place with fewer distractions and background noise. Children who are often shy and quiet will typically come out of their shell once outside. It has become very clear that our outdoor provision should be an extension of the indoors, that children can access no matter the weather. *‘School grounds play a vital role in every learning and development. They are unique spaces, providing safe and diverse opportunities for understanding, achievement, healthy exercise and play. We believe passionately that children and young people who miss out on good school grounds miss out on the best start in life. Without good school grounds, they will miss out on essential opportunities to be healthy and happy in their formative years, and to gather the experiences they need to be healthy and happy as adults’,* (LTL mission statement). The action research project set out to identify contributors to, and evidence improvements, in engagement in outdoor learning, physical and mental health and wellbeing, communication skills and interaction with peers and adults, EYFS staff awareness of the value of outdoor play.

## Research Process

The research project was coordinated and led by the EYFS phase leader and supported by other Reception class teacher and three members of support staff. The study group consisted of 49 children at the start, later 46 children (as some children left the school) from across the Reception year group. All of the children were assessed at baseline in September in all areas of learning as seen in Figure 1 and that data was taken as the starting point at the beginning of the research process.

After the research question was created and the action research process outlined, the EYFS leader delivered the training to EYFS support staff. The key changes in the EYFS framework were explained with an emphasis on the importance of the children’s physical and emotional wellbeing. The importance of vital interaction skills between children and adults was stressed. It was agreed that support staff would follow the created outdoor timetable (see Appendix 1) to ensure all learning areas were facilitated and children were supported by modelled activities and engaging interactions.

The next stage of the action research required the revision and improvement of some outdoor areas in order to provide engaging learning opportunities. Together, teachers and support staff identified the areas of improvement. The water area was enhanced by the addition of the channelling station (see Appendix 2) where children were able to solve problems, complete challenges planned and set by teachers and learn a broad range of related vocabulary. Challenge tasks were also introduced for sand and construction areas on a regular basis. The maths area was also developed further by creating self – selective area providing frequent and varied

opportunities for counting and developing a deep understanding of the numbers to 10. Rich opportunities were provided for children to develop their spatial reasoning skills. (see Appendix 3).

After two months of the action research process start, the art area was transformed further (see Appendix 4) into the self – accessible junk modelling station to ensure children had regular opportunities to engage with the arts, enabling them to explore and play with a wide range of media and materials. Development Matters (July 2021) states that the quality and variety of what children see, hear and participate in is crucial for developing their understanding, self-expression, vocabulary and ability to communicate through the arts.

Weekly phase meetings were held, which provided the opportunity for dialogue between practitioners. It allowed the phase leader to evaluate the study as it developed, making any necessary changes if or when needed. For example, the writing bags were introduced in the middle of the research process (see Appendix 5) to ensure children had the opportunity to apply their writing and communication skills as this was identified as a gap in the enhanced provision offer. The phase leader monitored the implementation of challenge tasks outdoors, observed the adult – child interaction and ensured that weekly challenge tasks were modelled to children. Children also were trained how to use new junk modelling station, maths shelf and writing bags.

Following the baseline assessment, all children were assessed again at the end of the spring term in April (Figure 3) and in the summer term in June (Figure 4). Children were assessed towards early learning goals in three primary areas of learning (communication and language, physical development and personal, social and emotional development) and four specific areas of learning (literacy, mathematics, understanding the world and expressive arts and design). The assessment data showed the progress children made from the start of the Reception.

|                                   |                 |               |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| <b>Communication and Language</b> | <b>Baseline</b> | <b>Spring</b> |
|                                   | 48%             | 76%           |
| <b>PSE Development</b>            | <b>Baseline</b> | <b>Spring</b> |
|                                   | 48%             | 78%           |
| <b>Physical Development</b>       | <b>Baseline</b> | <b>Spring</b> |
|                                   | 59%             | 82%           |
| <b>Literacy</b>                   | <b>Baseline</b> | <b>Spring</b> |
|                                   | 35%             | 67%           |
| <b>Mathematics</b>                | <b>Baseline</b> | <b>Spring</b> |
|                                   | 43%             | 70%           |
| <b>Understanding the World</b>    | <b>Baseline</b> | <b>Spring</b> |
|                                   | 43%             | 67%           |
| <b>Expressive Arts and Design</b> | <b>Baseline</b> | <b>Spring</b> |
|                                   | 46%             | 78%           |

**Fig. 3 Spring term assessment compared to baseline assessment**

|                            |          |        |
|----------------------------|----------|--------|
| Communication and Language | Baseline | Spring |
|                            | 48%      | 76%    |
| PSE Development            | Baseline | Spring |
|                            | 48%      | 78%    |
| Physical Development       | Baseline | Spring |
|                            | 59%      | 82%    |
| Literacy                   | Baseline | Spring |
|                            | 35%      | 67%    |
| Mathematics                | Baseline | Spring |
|                            | 43%      | 70%    |
| Understanding the World    | Baseline | Spring |
|                            | 43%      | 67%    |
| Expressive Arts and Design | Baseline | Spring |
|                            | 46%      | 78%    |

**Fig.4 Summer term assessment compared to spring term assessment**

The assessment data also showed progress disadvantaged children have made from the start of the Reception (Figure 5).

|  | Baseline (WAE) | Autumn | Spring | Summer ELG |
|--|----------------|--------|--------|------------|
|  | 33%            | 55%    | 67%    | 75%        |
|  | 19%            | 43%    | 56%    | 56%        |
|  | 43%            | 59%    | 64%    | 63%        |
|  | 25%            | 59%    | 70%    | 87%        |
|  | 0%             | 0%     | 50%    | 45%        |

**Fig.5 Percentage at a Good Level of Development in summer term**

## Findings

This research identified things we need to consider when offering children learning opportunities outdoors and the level of support or intervention we provide.

### Engagement in outdoor learning

Learning opportunities that focus on children's current interests and needs can be thoroughly inspiring. The research showed that allowing children to pursue a chosen activity from start to finish according to their own idea or design was an excellent way of supporting their learning and development. This was achieved by offering children a range of self – chosen resources and planned challenges or problems which naturally enabled children to want to have a go and solve problems. The adult being a role model allowed children to take ownership of the task. One of the great examples was when children used the writing bags to record the reminders on the post it notes after an adult initiated the problem of not having enough bark in the mud kitchen for the next day. This research proved that resourcing does not only mean buying new equipment to keep children occupied but can be as simple as having a modelling station full of junk. Children loved to create their own props and later used them in their imaginative role play. The level of engagement in outdoor activities increased with children having more ownership of the tasks and a broad variety of activities that were planned with the focus on children's interests.

### Physical and mental health and wellbeing

The end of year data shows the positive impact gained in all areas of learning which could not have been achieved if children were not feeling healthy or happy. This allows us to believe that the enhancement of the outdoor provision and social interactions being an important part of the learning environment led to children being more confident, active and willing to have a go.

### Communication skills and interaction with peers and adults

Another powerful resource that costs nothing but careful planning is vocabulary; and an adult, who is nearby supporting the child led activity by using essential vocabulary. It was amazing to see when eventually children used those words later in the week when taking part in similar activities. Observing both, child– adult and child – child, interactions indoors and outdoors led to conclusion of how more freely the outdoor learning flows allowing children to create their own challenges in their own time and place using resources provided in different learning areas. It also has been noticed that children implement the wider range of vocabulary introduced into their outdoor play.

### EYFS staff awareness of the value of outdoor play

The adult interaction with children as well as evidence gained from the outdoor play in the form of observations and independent outcomes in special books proved the whole value of the outdoor play. EYFS staff noted that having the same approach to outdoor provision as indoors creates calmer and more purposeful learning environment. It has been also noticed that some children demonstrated higher levels of concentration and quieter children had less anxieties comparing to being inside. The level of enjoyment being and learning outside increased for both, adults and children. *"The attitude, role and behaviour of adults is fundamental and absolutely crucial for children to be able to engage in regular and appropriate experience of a range of outdoor spaces from birth onwards. The relationships and interaction between children and adults are the most important of promoting effective outdoor play"*, (Jan White, 2011) Adults came to realise how much more thinking, enthusiasm and understanding children can demonstrate while being outdoors and how much more enjoyment of teaching outdoors adults gained themselves.

## Impact and Conclusion

The results of the action research project are based on pupil assessment throughout the academic year and the views of the EYFS staff and children regarding the enhanced outdoor provision. The feedback from practitioners stated that richer outdoor environment has become calmer, more purposeful and children's outcomes significantly improved. The feedback from children stated that they like playing and completing challenges outdoors. Most children said that adults help them with their learning whilst outdoors. The survey shows that children can rely on adults, (Appendix 6). Although not all children achieved expected level of development by the end of Reception, this research shows that resourcing and enhancing the outdoor provision had a positive impact on all children's mental and physical development as well as improved their interaction skills and increased the level of engagement in provided learning opportunities.

The findings from this research underpin the value of the outdoor provision in EYFS and how it is just as important as the indoors. At Southwold, children use the vast amount of time outdoors and the learning opportunities provided are an essential part of their day and cannot be an option or an extra. To enable children to show their full potential, they need adults who enjoy being outdoors themselves and understand the significance of outdoor learning.

**References**

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Jan White, *Outdoor Provision in the Early Years*, SAGE publications Ltd, First published (2011)

*Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage*. Department for Education, (Published: 31 March 2021, Effective: 1 September 2021) Accessed at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/974907/EYFS\\_framework\\_-\\_March\\_2021.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/974907/EYFS_framework_-_March_2021.pdf)

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**Appendices**

**Appendix 1 – Support staff timetable**

| EYFS Outdoor Supervision Rota |                        |                           |                              |                        |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
|                               | Shelter/<br>table tops | Sand area/<br>mud kitchen | Water area/<br>Role play hut | Downstairs<br>play tub |
| Monday                        | Staff 1                | Staff 4                   | Staff 3                      | Staff 2                |
| Tuesday                       | Staff 2                | Staff 1                   | Staff 4                      | Staff 3                |
| Wednesday                     | Staff 3                | Staff 2                   | Staff 1                      | Staff 4                |
| Thursday                      | Staff 4                | Staff 3                   | Staff 2                      | Staff 1                |
| Friday                        | Staff 1                | Staff 4                   | Staff 3                      | Staff 2                |

**Appendix 2 – Water channelling station**



### Appendix 3 – Weekly challenges



### Appendix 4 – Junk modelling station



### Appendix 5 – Writing bags



### Appendix 6 – Pupil survey

Southwold EYFS Pupil survey

|    |  | Always | Sometimes | Never |
|----|--|--------|-----------|-------|
| 1. | I am happy to be in school.                                    | 97 %   | 3 %       | 0 %   |
| 2. | I like indoor activities.                                      | 77 %   | 19 %      | 4 %   |
| 3. | I like outdoor activities.                                     | 91 %   | 9 %       | 0 %   |
| 4. | Adults explain to me how to do my work whilst outdoors.        | 96%    | 4 %       | 0 %   |
| 5. | I am confident to take on challenges provided in outdoor area. | 92 %   | 6 %       | 2 %   |
| 6. | I know I can ask an adult for help when learning outside.      | 98 %   | 2 %       | 0 %   |