



The Outdoor Learning Environment

Introduction

At Caverstede Nursery School there are three gardens:

- The Nursery Garden,
- The Woodland Garden
- Ladybird's Garden
- The Front Garden

Rationale

Outdoor play is integral to children's emotional, social, physical and intellectual development. The daily opportunity to access the outdoors impacts on children's level of well-being (Laevers, 1994).

Some children prefer to be outdoors, feel better about themselves and become more adventurous and playful in their learning. Ref Parker C in Whitbread, D. *Teaching and Learning in the Early Years*, Third Edition 2008.

We know movement and physical activity, especially outdoors:

- Underpins **mental health** through the joy of movement and feeling capable
- Develops **physical health** through activity
- Sets up **core neurological systems**, such as balance, body awareness and cross-lateral coordination
- Is essential to the development of **vision**
- Supports **personal and social health** through physical play with others
- **Aids learning** through moving and doing – brain and body develop together
- Plays a core role in the **development of the hands** and tool use
- Lays foundations for **healthy attitudes** and interests for life

10 Facts about the Importance of Free Access to Outdoor Play

1. Movement is a vital component of play and other ways of learning and **REQUIRES SPACE**.
2. Growth and Development of body and brain are inseparable.
3. Ample experience in Running, Climbing and Balancing is necessary if children are to learn to read and write successfully.
4. Cramped Home Conditions of many young active children can restrict movement.
5. Children are Losing the Places in society where they can play freely.
6. The Physical Right of children to be active must be safeguarded throughout the day and in all weathers.
7. The potential for Heart Disease begins in early childhood.
8. Some Learning can only happen outside.
9. The Whole Curriculum can be discovered outside.
10. Boys and Girls (for the same and different reasons) need freedom to be safely adventurous.

'Exercising Muscles and Minds' by Marjorie Ouvry. 2003

Our Aims

Through outdoor play and exploration children can develop:

- Communication, language and literacy
- Physical strength and confidence
- Spatial awareness
- Gross and fine motor skills
- A sense of freedom, exhilaration and self expression
- Opportunities to build on their natural motivation and curiosity about the world in which they live
- An understanding of the effect of their actions upon other people and the environment (Eco awareness)
- Opportunities to develop tactile and sensory awareness
- An understanding of the wide range of natural resources in the changing world outside
- Knowledge, understanding and skills in all areas of learning and experience
- The values, and attitudes, skills and knowledge and understanding of global citizenship.
- Learning and finding out about living things and how to take care of them
- Sense of wonder and curiosity about the world around them.
- Their well being and mental health

A well planned outdoor environment contributes to the development of the whole child, and provides opportunities for the adults to observe, record and extend young children's development in different contexts.

Aims into practice

The outdoor area is available to every child on a daily basis.

Free flow outdoor play is always available during nursery sessions so that children can spend extended periods of uninterrupted time involved self-chosen play. Movement and activity is supported and encouraged: throughout provision and practice, focusing on outdoors.

- It is every practitioner's responsibility to ensure children are playing and learning safely and with purpose.
- It is every practitioner's responsibility to ensure the safe deployment of staff in the environment. If the majority of children are outside this should be reflected by the number of practitioners.
- Our continuous provision allows children to access resources independently.
- Observing children's play enables us to enhance the outdoor provision and experiences.
- Woodland Days are planned weekly throughout the seasons to give children first hand experiences of moving, playing and exploring in a natural, physical environment using all the senses.
- Staff incorporate letters and sounds Phase 1 into the provision and children's play
- Mathematical opportunities are enhanced by using the natural environment and real life experiences outdoors

Sensory Integration opportunities are embedded in the environment:

1. **Vestibular activity** (movement and balance) turning, spinning, rolling, swinging, rocking, tilting, falling, jumping, bouncing, sliding, moving fast for example the swings, sunken trampoline, slides, hills, climbing pod, crates and planks, rolling mats.
2. **Proprioceptive activity** (body awareness) pushing, pulling, lifting, carrying, stretching, hanging, throwing for example swings, trolleys, balls and beanbags
 - Creating opportunities for Cross lateral activity e.g. crawling
 - Experiences for the feet – bare feet on different textures: water, grass, sand, mud
 - Upper arm strength and mobility – swings, climbing frames, commando crawling, wheelbarrow races, wall pushing
 - Experiences for the hands – becoming a dextrous tool-user - gardening tools, woodwork tools, mark making tools
 - Encouraging high activity levels and reducing sedentary behaviour
 - Ensure plenty of rest and sleep

Adult Role

- Staff support the development of language through modelling, introduction of new words, repetition, and extension of children's vocabulary.

- Staff help children to become aware of the world around them through allowing them to explore the garden, stimulating their interest and responding to their connections with the elements and natural environment.
- Staff teach children the skills of using outdoor tools and equipment safely and with care.
- Staff provide a secure and safe environment in which children can take risks and challenge themselves.
- Staff build on children's experiences at home and in other settings.
- Staff plan and observe next steps for children's development using the indoor and outdoor environment.
- Staff foster and promote a sense of responsibility for caring for the environment and living things especially through growing and recycling.
- Staff introduce the correct terminology of natural and living things.
- Staff encourage children to explore their physicality through movement and sound.
- Staff model and demonstrate exploration of the garden, its equipment and appropriate tools and clothing.
- Staff assist children in accessing the garden to practice and develop their individual skills.
- Staff encourage children to work collaboratively, sharing skills, knowledge and enjoyment.
- Staff participate with enthusiasm in children's play.
- Staff care for and maintain resources.
- Staff are positive role models for parents, by demonstrating and modelling support for children's outdoor play.
- Staff actively encourage parents to be involved in their child's learning and development and value experiences within the outdoor environment.
- Staff create a movement-rich environment, full of suitable stimuli and challenges
- Staff build movement and physical activity into varied experiences outdoors
- Staff provide encouragement and just enough support for children to extend their abilities at their own pace
- Staff maximise opportunities to explore making and listening to different sounds in the environment, using objects and using body and movement
- Staff incorporate stories and rhymes into the outdoor provision
- Staff provide opportunities for mark making on different scales and using different materials
- Staff maximise opportunities for counting objects, people, movements and categorising and classifying objects and materials in children's play, building on early maths skills and interests

Parent/Carer Involvement

Parents are invited to join in with celebrations and projects e.g. Chinese Dragon Dance and May Pole dancing.

As part of the Great Explorers groups parents are very much at the heart of interacting in their child's play. When engaged in outdoor play, parents are encouraged to support their children in exploring outdoor resources as well as embracing the outdoor experience. e.g. weather and wildlife.

Planning

Planning incorporates a balance between adult and child initiated activities and experiences taking account of children's interests, and experiences. Individual and group planning incorporates all areas of learning and development and puts the principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage into practice.

Areas of Provision - Description and Suggestions

The Nursery Garden

Resource	Description	Suggestions
Large	Crates, guttering, spools, tyres, discs, planks,	Enhance this area with ladders, natural

construction	large hollow blocks, house bricks, hard hats, barrows, tools, enables children to work on a large scale.	resources, cardboard boxes, tubes, tape measures, rulers, clipboards, tools, paintbrushes, books.
Mark making	Chalks and rubbers, computer keyboard, pens, pads, pencils, different size paper, brushes and water.	Opportunity for children to mark make on a large scale. Adults could model writing, words, sound, scribe stories. Chalk can be rubbed off. Try inverted mark making with large paint brushes and water. Blackboards. Mobile phones.
Sensory Trail	A path with hidden objects	Search for the crocodile, coloured marbles, fossils in the path, try with bare feet.
Climbing Pod	Natural wooden resources to develop gross motor and sensory development, climbing wall, rope bridge, and scramble net.	Encourage children to take risks and be challenged. Hanging upside down. Play ring games, number songs, speckled frogs, monkeys on a bed or in a tree. Good for proprioceptive development, vestibular development and upper arm strength.
Water play area	Tap located outside Butterfly class, trays, buckets, hoses, towers and gutters, water wall.	Push tap to encourage independence. Water may be transported for digging, gardening, mark making. Water can be frozen in winter. Practitioners to teach children about water conservation.
Guttering and towers	Selection of guttering, and blue towers, water wall.	Join gutters together to create pathways for balls, vehicles, water. Good for investigating speed, distance, gradients, problem solving, turn taking. Cars, balls, conkers, pebbles, milk bottle tops etc.
Water Feature	Please refer to separate instructions for use and maintenance of the water feature.	Water feature accessed in wellies and bare feet. Water feature touch, feel, fill, pour etc.
Wellie rack	A selection of wellies and waterproofs to wear in wet/cold and snowy weather and to access the water play.	Practitioners need to support children and encourage autonomy and independence.
Sand play area	Area has a mirror to deter cats. A sand cover is placed on the sand pit at the end of each day. The children should be encouraged to keep sand in the area.	Dig, excavate, fill, pour and spread. Use large equipment, buckets, planks, blocks, cement spreaders, natural resources, pebbles and shells. Make marks and pictures in the sand. Transport water, guttering for explorative play. Metal detectors.
Hills	Astro turf mounds surround the wooden bridge.	Run up, run down, feel high, feel low, roll, march, use balls, hoops, carts, a good base for using guttering and drain pipes, sit in the hill and chat, play a ring game, lay and watch the clouds. Add mats for rolling sing Jack and Jill Try bare feet Use of body boards.
Wooden Bridge	The wooden bridge is surrounded by rolling hills.	Imagine, march, stamp, creep, "The Three Billy Goats Gruff." Sell tickets to cross, have a password. Traffic lights stop and go
Resource	Description	Suggestions
Planting	A wide variety of interesting and exotic plants are situated throughout the outdoor area. They include, olive trees, buddleia, honeysuckle, woodland plants, grasses.	All planting is safe for the children to touch and use.
Sensory area	Swinging area: Flat swing Spinning board	Safety rules: Adults to be present when children are accessing the swings No wheeled toys in the swinging area.

	Seated swing Sausage swing Balloon swing Bar swing	Singing games, turn taking, counting, spinning-sensory good for vestibular development.
	Sunken Trampoline	Children may access the trampoline when an adult is supervising 1 child at a time, shoes taken off. Adults can model and join child if appropriate. Jumping, bouncing, rolling, counting, singing. Good for vestibular development. More experienced children can begin to seat drop, pike/star jumps. Waiting for a turn can become a learning experience - counting, singing, and writing lists/tickets.
	Small trampoline and gym mats	Mats can be moved for rough and tumble play (with rules), Jabadeo, movement development and exploration
Slide and A-frame	A frame and wooden slide for cochlear implant safety	Climbing, sliding, singing, taking turns/racing, creating circuits, counting, stretching tall, jumping and landing safely, moving in different ways.
Dressing up and role play	Costumes-fire, police, construction, princesses. Dolls, buggies, baby bath, picnic set.	Link to movement, stories, construction, transporting
PE equipment	Balls, bats, hockey sticks, skittles, hoops, bean bags, cones	Aiming, throwing, hitting, taking turns, making up games, teaching skills, add scores, make goals/hockey/football/tennis/ basketball.
Wheeled toys	Scooters, trikes, bikes, barrows trolleys, body boards and wheelies	Role play, journeys, buses, directions. Enhance with songs, mark making, numbers tickets/turn taking. Wheeled toys not to be used in the swinging area. Bikes and trikes are not used as continuous provision within the nursery garden; however they should be used as an enhanced resource in the in the nursery garden. They can contribute to sensory development, balance, control and coordination as well as supporting dynamic schemas and learning styles, building confidence and social skills.
Musical instruments	Drums	Comparing sounds, beating patterns, accompanying songs- letters and sounds phase 1
	Music frame	Explore sounds, echo using pipes letters and sounds phase 1
	Large outdoor Glockenspiel	Compare colours and sounds, accompany songs, and beat patterns. Letters and sounds phase 1
Drinking fountains	Situated next to the outdoor water tap, between the Butterfly and Ladybird class, and also next to the cleaners cupboard.	Encourage children to drink regularly throughout the session.

The Woodland/Ladybird Garden

	Resource	Description	Suggestions
Undercover garden (Ladybird Garden)		Includes sand pod, picnic bench, tactile trays, bird table and bird feeders. Metal curtain, music wall, chalk board, shelf of natural resources.	Space for games, stories, large art activities, movement, bikes, Parachute, ring games maypole dancing. Portable speakers can be used for music outside. Letters and sounds phase 1 Encourage mark making using the chalks. Developing gross motor skills using the a-frame,

		Den. A-frame, steps and planks.	steps and planks. The den can be used as a communication friendly space.
Sitting area	Sculpture trail	Gruffalo sculpture - path, snake, owl, fox, mouse and toadstools.	Use for role-play, tell or read the story, explore the materials, search for the characters, picnic snack, bonfire party.
	Story Chair	Large wooden story chair	Adults or children can tell and listen to stories, sing songs.
Vegetable garden area	Digging pod	Filled with soil.	Use resources in the potting shed, make mud pies and mixtures, pour water, children may collect their own water from the water-butt or outdoor tap. Use cobbles, logs, leaves, play garden centres, dig for treasure or fossils for children to discover, enhance with mark making catalogues, lists, stories, bug hunting and identification.
	Poly tunnel	To enhance children's learning by growing flowers and vegetables.	Use for focus groups to plant seeds, for example beans, peas, marrows, tomatoes, sunflowers, sweet peas. Growing may be extended using pots; potatoes are great grown like this. Children need to share in nurturing and harvesting their crop. Seasonal change in vegetables.
	Potting Shed	Wooden shed, storage for resources: rakes, spades, hoes, wheel barrows, brooms, hand folks, trowels, metal bowls, pots, wellies, watering cans, garden books, white board on back of the door- sharing information	Encourage children to access and return resources e.g. wheelbarrows, mark making, laminated words and labels, take groups at literacy time, put out chairs to sit and talk. Provide laminated books, catalogues, order forms, gardening magazines.
	Three growing pods	Situated near the compost and digging pod. One per class.	Use for focus groups to plant seeds, for example beans, peas, marrows, tomatoes, sunflowers, sweet peas. Growing may be extended using pots; potatoes are great grown like this. Children need to share in nurturing and harvesting their crop. Seasonal change in vegetables.
Composting areas	.	3 compost bins on hard standing next to the potting shed	Create compost using fallen leaves, trimmings from hedges, general garden waste, fruit/vegetables left over from snack/lunch, teabags, shredded paper. The bins are used alternately each season to allow the composting process to happen. Use opportunity to talk through and look at recycling and reusing.
Forest area	Woodland House	Situated in shady woodland area with woodland planting, accessible for children in wheelchairs via sloping walkway.	Encourage role-play with stories from laminated books. Hide, sing songs, play ring games, put on a play, play instruments. 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears House', 'Where's the bear?' 'Where's my teddy?' stories. Transform into a bird hide with binoculars, bird guides and camouflage.
	Resource	Description	Suggestions
	Shady wooded area	To enhance children's environmental and aesthetic awareness.	Observe changes in nature- leaves, sticky buds, blossom, berries, conkers. Look at shadows and sunlight through the leaves and branches. Feed the birds on the bird table and tree hangings - make bird cakes. Watch birds building nests in trees and nest boxes, watch birds bathing in the bird bath. Observe the bug hotel – add to the layers of bedding, look for bugs under logs and stones. Encourage the use of sticky strips to look closely

			at the environment and promote awareness and curiosity of what they find. Staff trained in Forest skills work closely with small groups using natural materials and tools such as hacksaws, knives, peelers and a Kelly kettle.
	Herb garden	Variety of sensory smells, tastes and textures	Water herbs in summer, taste safely, smell, add to cooking or snack, mix in potions, run around and through, weeding and general care
	Mud kitchen	Mud play Pots/pans Wooden mud kitchen unit.	Children use resource for cooking, washing, and socialising.
Pond Currently looking to replace this area in the near future.	Small sunken pond	Situated next to the Butterfly conservatory. Variety of water plants in the pond, and rockery plants around the edge. Covered with netting and metal grid.	Look for frogs and frogspawn in spring, maintain area around pond, look for pond insects. See risk assessment for pond.
Storage	Forest skills storage boxes and shelving unit.	Large storage box, situated opposite wooden house. Contains various equipment to enhance Woodland day opportunities.	Storage box contains various equipment for Windy days: wind socks, kites, ribbons. Rainy days: foil, metal trays, umbrellas. Forest skills equipment: Kelly kettle, fire pit, tent pegs, vegetable peelers; ruck sack. Also contains various tarpaulins, shower curtains and ground sheets.
	Bug Hotel	Situated near the bay trees, next to the adult's shed.	'Bug Hotel' provides opportunities to look at hibernation through the winter months, looking at various animals that may use the hotel such as toads, hedgehogs, and various insects. During the summer the 'Bug Hotel' provides opportunities for bug hunts, looking closely at the habitats for insects and at the details of insects themselves.

The Front Garden

Resource	Description	Suggestions
Mark making/Painting	Easel is used outdoors	Opportunity for children to explore a variety of media including paints, chalk, pens and pencils
Climbing	Natural wooden resources to develop gross motor and sensory development.	Encourage children to take risks and be challenged using wooden benches and log stepping stones. Staff to be aware of the boundary fence
Planting	A wide variety of interesting and exotic plants are situated throughout the outdoor area. They include bamboo, small trees, a variety of bushes and rosemary and strawberry plants	All planting is safe for the children to touch and use.
Wheeled Toys	Bikes and barrows	Simple role play, journeys, direction.
PE equipment	Balls, cones, tunnels, beanbags, hoops	Aiming throwing, hitting, taking turns, making up games, teaching skills, add scores, make goals.
Water play area	Low sided trays with water added	Water maybe transported, used with brushes or be sat in.
Tactile Play	Low sided trays with cornflakes, shaving foam, lentils, angel delight, jelly, corn flour added.	All tactile resources maybe transported, explored and sat in.
Sensory experiences	Encourages discovery play, understanding the world, communication and sensory development. All resources can be touched and experimented with.	Low level, sturdy, clothes airier hung with a variation of resources to make sounds, e.g. stainless steel pots and pans, bells and shakers stones and shells. Turf "touch spots". Squares of real grass used alone to attract bugs, worms, ants etc or with added resources such as plastic reptiles. Washing line set across the garden area hung with a range of vibrant and textured fabrics or natural resources such as, pine cones, leaves and branches.

The vegetable garden & nursery garden suggested yearly plan

<p>January</p> <p>Garden maintenance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear any leaves from area • Cover soil on vegetable patch with polythene to prepare for early sowing • Check repairs on shed indoor and out, check if it needs protecting • Prune standard apple trees • Prune overgrown soft fruit bushes 	<p>February</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prune certain clematis • Prune climber hedges and old shrubs • Early vegetables and salad to be planted if possible but needs to be covered to protect from frost use propagator • Propagate for early vegetables (green beans, baby carrots, beetroot, radish, spinach) trays lettuce etc • Chit potatoes • Prepare the soil for sowing • Prune raspberries, one inch above the ground • View vegetable growing chart • Check water butt clean out and clear leave from gutter and pipes 	<p>March</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weeding of all nursery garden • Re-pot, freshen and feed potted plants • Prepare soil – then sow seedlings from propagator e.g. lettuce, radishes, spring onions, leeks, onions, parsnips, spinach, turnips • Sow in propagator chillies, sweet peppers, bedding plants and tomatoes • Compost - not weeds, not too many woody materials unless using shredder, only uncooked fruit and vegetable waste
<p>April</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wait for six weeks after the daffodil bulbs have flowered before cutting foliage down • Look after the vegetables, hoe regularly, thin out and transplant seedlings, give support to peas and beans sown earlier • Sow hardy herbs, dill, parsley, basil • Plant chitted potatoes • Ventilate the propagator on sunny days • Water propagator seedlings (rota) use water butt. • Plant strawberries in pots • Refer to seed packets for thinning out 	<p>May</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weeding • Continue watering of vegetable patch and propagator • Clear spring flower plants • Plant and sow vegetables e.g. French and runner beans, courgettes, pumpkin and leeks, sweet corn • Deadhead spring flowering bulbs • Pumpkin and squashes need room and well fertilized ground/compost • Put supports in beans, tomatoes, chillies, peppers • Earth up potato when needed 	<p>June</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water vegetables and propagator and feed • Weeding • Continue to plant vegetables that have grown and been donated • Protect fruit bushes with netting • Harvest vegetables that are ready (for snack, and lunch) • Earth up potatoes when needed • Tomato plants need additional feeding
<p>July</p> <p>Continue watering vegetables and propagator</p> <p>Harvest fruits, strawberries, gooseberries, blackcurrant (for snack, and lunch)</p> <p>Watch plant containers for drying out</p> <p>Cut dry or freeze herbs</p> <p>Tidy beds/plants from runners</p> <p>Extended Provision to continue to harvest, plant, and water.</p>	<p>September</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep watering plants/vegetables regularly use the water butt • Move tender plants or vegetable plants under propagator to protect • Plant spring cabbage • Harvest marrows and courgettes and any crops • Leave tomatoes on plants until weather turns, then bring inside to ripen • Pot some new herbs if needed • Blackberries ready to be picked and harvested • Check compost bin turned, continue to recycle all garden waste 	<p>October</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to compost not weeds, not too many woody materials unless using the shredder • Cut back all Buddleia • Plant any spring bulbs • Harvest any vegetables, e.g. pumpkins, carrots, potatoes, leeks and cauliflowers • Prune blackberry bush • Not as much watering needed
<p>November</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digging and forking over vegetable patch • Protect container plants from wind, persistent rain and cold weather • Harvest vegetables such as leeks and Brussels • Plant any fruit trees if applicable • Reduce watering • Last chance to plant any spring bulbs • Clear fallen leaves 	<p>December</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn over the ground it reduces the soil pests do this several times • Clear away rubbish • Rake up leaves • Seed catalogues available • Prune vines • Clean tools, shed, pots and seed trays • Bubble wrap outdoor tap (protection from frost) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff to use compost bin in kitchen and take a shared ownership of taking to compost bin. • A compost bin for children and staff to use after snack, staff to support during session time. • Gardener needs to be informed of plan and jobs needed doing within each month to support staff.