Early Years/KS1 Outdoor Learning and Forest School
Outdoor Provision Development.
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Part 1: Introduction

Throughout the Foundation Stage and KS1, we use our outdoor learning areas to develop as many aspects of learning set out in the EYFS and national curriculum as possible. Our areas are developing into nature rich classrooms, which can be used by the children to learn within the space and use the freedom it offers.

Research carried out especially linked with the EYFS shows that the outdoor learning environment is a key support to children development.

The EYFS states:

‘Being outdoors has a positive impact on children's sense of well-being and helps all aspects of children's development.’

‘Being outdoors offers opportunities for doing things in different ways and on different scales than when indoors’

It gives first hand contact with weather, seasons and the natural world.’

Outdoor learning environments offer children freedom to explore, use their senses, and be physically active and exuberant.’

We have built our ideas upon these statements with the way we use the outdoors. Making sure that we give the opportunity of being outside.
Within the EYFS document ‘Effective Practice: Outdoor Learning’ the key messages are:

1. The outdoor environment has unique characteristics and features.
2. Outdoor learning has equal value to indoor learning.
3. Outdoor learning has a positive impact on children’s well-being and development.
4. Children need the support of attentive and engaged adults who are enthusiastic about the outdoors and understand the importance of outdoor learning.
5. Outdoor learning is enhanced by an environment that is richly resourced with play materials that can be adapted and used in different ways.
6. An approach to outdoor learning that considers experiences rather than equipment places children at the centre of the provision being made.

‘Children can learn to make decisions, solve problems and grow in confidence in their own abilities outdoors and they need plenty of time to investigate their outdoor environment purposefully. They will make predictions about what may happen based on their previous play experiences and test out these ideas and theories.’

(EYFS Outdoors 2007)
Part 2: Using the EYFS Key Messages to develop the outdoor learning through to KS1.

The outdoor environment has unique characteristics and features. Being outdoors gives children the opportunity to explore nature and what it has to offer first-hand. We go outside in all weathers so the children can build their experiences on what the natural environment has to offer to them. They see patterns of change through the seasons, and have the space and freedom to naturally satisfy their thirst for investigation.

Combining different sections within our areas, the children can use their senses and imagination to play and learn individually and as part of a group. The outdoor environment offers space and opportunity to move, and develop both fine motor and gross motor skills.

‘Outdoors, children can hear and respond to a different range of sounds, beginning to recognise and distinguish between noises in the outdoor environment. They can use actions and movement alongside words and sounds to convey their ideas and meanings. The outdoors is a place where stories, songs and poems can be shared and enacted.’ (EYFS resources 2007)
Part 3: Development of our Outdoor Learning Areas

‘In a survey of schools who had improved their grounds, 65% reported an improved attitude to learning, 73% an improvement in behaviour and 64% a reduction in bullying. 84% of schools noticed improvements in social interaction while 85% reported an increase in healthy active play.’ (Learning Through Landscapes information leaflet – Professional Grounds Advice 2008)

At Maple Grove we have four outdoor learning areas, each with different features and resources which have been established to our needs.

Foundation stage has an outdoor learning area that is used everyday throughout the year in their planning time, where the children can access different activities like climbing, sand, digging and a mud kitchen. They are able to use their toys in the natural environment.

We have a key stage one outdoor learning area positioned at the front of the school which Key Stage One access in the afternoons for exploratory play, Foundation Stage and afterschool club also have access to this area. Also this area is used for outdoor learning sessions.

Our key stage two outdoor learning area near our field has been designed and developed especially for outdoor learning. Including natural habitats, a pond, climbing areas and planters to grow our own plants, herbs and vegetables. This area is accessed by all classes in the school for outdoor learning and also an after school gardening club.

Our fourth outdoor learning area is the quad, where afterschool club grow and maintain vegetables which provide them at tea time.

When we first started to develop our outdoor learning areas we considered

○ What did we have at present

○ The children who would be accessing the areas

○ What did the children and the school want in the areas

○ What would we need to do to develop our plans
Foundation stage outdoor learning area.

Structurally the area stays the same, but the resources are rotated to accommodate the children's interests.
KS1 Outdoor Learning Area

This area has been developed through forest school and outdoor learning. It has a wigwam where the children can weave material or natural materials, a log circle with fire pit, a recently planted willow den and a natural climbing area.
KS2 Outdoor learning area

We have developed this area since summer 2014. A pond, willow den and planting areas have been added and are naturally developing.
The Quad

The quad has been developed into a resourceful growing area with growing boxes added in 2015. The afterschool club grow and maintain plants and vegetables which they serve at tea time as part of a healthy meal.
Part 4: Maintenance

Maintenance is important to keep the outdoor classrooms accessible for everybody all year round. We have a gardener who maintains the areas, and when the classes go out they too have responsibility for looking after the area. The KS2 area is allowed to naturally grow, the pathways are kept clear and plant boxes covered and kept free from weeds. Breakfast and afterschool club tend to the quads plants and vegetables.