

Outdoor learning policy



Rationale

At Cart Mill Family Centre we believe that all children have the right to access the outdoors. Furthermore, children thrive and their minds and bodies develop best when they have access to stimulating outdoor environments for learning through play and real experiences.

“children and young people to enjoy high quality play opportunities, particularly outdoor free play in stimulating spaces with access to nature, on a daily basis in early learning and childcare, nursery and school” (Play Strategy for Scotland).

We believe that if a child feels safe and stimulated, they will ask questions, volunteer ideas, set out to solve problems and take risks, without fear of making a mistake, leading to a depth of understanding. If the learning is meaningful to their lives, they will find it relevant, interesting and worth the effort of hard work and persistence, leading to sustained learning and progress over time. If they have choice and flexibility, they will set themselves ambitious personal goals, have fun working with their peers or independently and become adaptable in the face of challenges, leading to transferable skills and applications in a wide range of contexts.

Much research is available that indicates that being and playing outside is vital for children’s physical health and development, emotional wellbeing and promotes cognitive development and achievement. When outdoors, children have the freedom to explore and develop their physical boundaries, to take risks and to discover the real world with all their senses. This can have huge positive effects on a child’s self-esteem and confidence. Outside can be liberating; children have room to move, be noisy, messy and work on a larger scale.

“We all know the benefits of outdoor learning, exercise and play for children. Playing, learning and having fun outdoors helps to improve wellbeing and resilience, as well as physical and mental health and also provides children with the opportunity to develop a life-long appreciation of the natural world” (Out to Play).

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 incorporates the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into law in Scotland. As a Rights Respecting School our commitment to children’s rights is reflected through staff language and actions when working with children, families and the community.

Aims

We believe that the outdoor environment is a rich, dynamic and natural space for learning and development in children of all ages. Its value as an essential learning resource has been recognised by many pieces of research including My World Outdoors, Out to Play, Realising the Ambition to name a few.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that:

- The outdoors has a positive impact on children's sense of well-being, engagement and helps all aspects of children's development, including physical, emotional and social

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- Playing, learning and exploring outdoors all offer opportunities for children (and adults) to engage, solve problems and do things in different ways
- The outdoors environments offer a chance to experience learning on a different scale in comparison to being indoors
- Being outdoors gives children first-hand, formative contact with the weather, seasons and the natural world.
- The outdoor environment is liberating and can offer children the freedom to explore, use their senses and be physically active and exuberant.
- The outdoor environment usually offers more freedom and space to move, and inspires different movement from that indoors. This is vital for young children to develop their coordination, build muscle mass and experiment with moving their bodies.
- Every child has a right to daily outdoor learning and as much value should be placed on the outdoor environment as inside.

Definitions

The outdoor environment is defined as being the area outside of the classroom, an extension of the indoor provision: The outdoor environment is where children can come into contact with the ever changing systems of nature and the four elements. It is the dynamic world of living and non-living things that endlessly interact through time and space. The seasonal changes and differing weather conditions provide children with a sense of time and place and offer endless investigation possibilities. Research suggests that if children do not have significant contact with the natural world in their early years then they can become afraid of it, disconnected from it.

“The child who has cared for another living thing is more easily led to care for his own life” (Froebel)

At Cart Mill we believe the key principles and systems of outdoor learning are as follows:

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

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- 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.

“I make informed choices and decisions about the risks I take in my daily life and am encouraged to take positive risks which enhance the quality of my life.” (My World Outdoors).

At Cart Mill Family Centre, children will have free flow access to the outdoors throughout the day unless there are weather warnings in place that would cause dangers to the children or staff in the centre.

Outdoor based staff risk assess daily, to ensure that equipment is safe to use by everyone and monitor weather frequently.

The Care Inspectorate support services taking a positive approach to risk in order to achieve the best outcomes for children. This means moving away from a traditional deficit model that takes a risk-averse approach, which can unnecessarily restrict children’s experiences, to a more holistic risk-benefit model. For example, they encourage services to use risk assessment to support children to enjoy potentially hazardous activities such as woodwork using real tools, exploring nature and playing in the mud and rain.

“The best classroom and the richest cupboard is roofed only by the sky”
(Margaret McMillan)



UNCRC Article 2 No Discrimination: All children have all these rights, no matter who they are, where they live, what language they speak, what their religion is, what they think, what they look like, if they are a boy or girl, if they have a disability, if they are rich or poor, and no matter who their parents or families are or what their parents or families believe or do. No child should be treated unfairly for any reason.

UNCRC Article 3 Best Interests of the Child: When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children. All adults should do what is best for children

UNCRC Article 12 Respect for Children’s Views: Children have the right to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them. Adults should listen and take children seriously.

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UNCRC Article 23 Children with Disabilities: Every child with a disability should enjoy the best possible life in society.

UNCRC Article 29 Aims of Education: Children's education should help them fully develop their personalities, talents and abilities. It should teach them to understand their own rights, and to respect other people's rights, cultures and differences.

UNCRC Article 31 Rest and Play: Every child has the right to rest, relax and play.

References

<https://education.gov.scot/media/3bjpr3wa/realisingtheambition.pdf>

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<https://www.froebel.org.uk/uploads/documents/FT-Outdoor-Play-Pamphlet.pdf>

<https://hub.careinspectorate.com/how-we-support-improvement/quality-improvement-programmes-and-topics/space-to-grow-and-thrive/>

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